

*U.S. Foreign Policy
towards Colombia
in the Post-Cold War era*

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Thesis in Political Science for the Cand.Polit degree

September 2004

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Acknowledgments

It was in 2002, during my time as an exchange student to Montana State University that I first became interested in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Katie Knight, at Colombia Support Network, presented a slide show of her trip to Colombia. When I started the process of writing my master's thesis, I remembered the impression that the slideshow had on me. More difficult than deciding the topic of my thesis, was finding someone that could advise me on the topic. In the end, I chose one political scientist, Benedicte Bull, and one social anthropologist, Jennifer Schirmer. Both have contributed with interesting, yet sometimes challenging, suggestions and feedback. I would like to thank them both! Special thanks to Jennifer for allowing me to use her office the times she was in Colombia. Thanks also to the Centre for Environment and Development (SUM) for providing me with a desk, computer and an academic environment. I particularly want to thank Dan Banik for being such a great inspirer for myself and many other students. He is as close to an ideal teacher as I could envision. Thanks also to Therese Vangstad and Stine Thomassen for assistance with lay-out.

Some people deserve particular recognition. First, thanks to James Deutch for all his help, prior to and during my stay, in Washington D.C. and to the Smiths for letting me use their apartment in Georgetown. Thanks also to my Colombian friend, Vicente Giordanelli and to his family, especially his mother Yalile Fadil, who was my host during my stay in Bogotá. They all contributed to making my fieldwork in the U.S. and Colombia possible.

I also want to thank Lena Juntti, Matt Annala and Bryan Stennes for useful feedback, and Paula Tuduri for translation help. To my wonderful sister and friend, Kristin and to my greatest supporter, Ryan, thank you for comments and proof reading! Also, thank you both for never losing faith in me and for making me smile when I'd much rather cry. Thanks also to my good friends who have reminded me that there exists a world outside of my thesis.

Finally I would like to acknowledge my loving parents, my supportive grandmother and my “USA mom”, Betty.

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MAP OF COLOMBIA



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SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.LIB.UTEXAS.EDU/MAPS/AMERICAS/COLOMBIA_POL_2001.JPG](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/colombia_pol_2001.jpg)

1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and discuss the driving factors of United States' (U.S.) foreign policy towards Colombia. The main question of this thesis is: *"To what extent can the threats posed by drugs explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia in the post-Cold War era?"*

A common understanding of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is that it is driven by domestic concerns about the drug production originating in Colombia destined for the U.S. However, as my thesis will argue, such an understanding is an over-simplification of a complex set of issues. This thesis hypothesizes that *"drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics."* Geopolitics is used to define the U.S. geographical location. That is to say, the U.S. proximity to Latin America; the fact that Colombia has large untapped oil resources and borders oil rich Venezuela provide the U.S. with a strategic interest in Colombia.

The U.S. has multiple and some times competing reasons and justifications for being involved in Colombia. Hence no single explanation is sufficient to understand the U.S. longstanding involvement in Colombia, and I find that the actual policymaking is too complex for a unitary actor model. One needs to take into account the complexity of U.S. policymaking *in addition* to the intricacy of the Colombian conflict. This is reflected by the development of this thesis, hence its two-level nature (domestic U.S. policy and U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia). My second hypothesis is thus: *"It is crucial to address the complexity of U.S. domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia."*

The main motivation behind this study is the lack of a thorough analysis of the driving factors of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Although the general effects of U.S. foreign policy have been widely studied throughout the years, little attention has been directed towards identifying the factors and the main motivation behind U.S. foreign policy. In particular, very few researchers in Norway have explored the

driving factors behind U.S. foreign policy towards Latin America in general or Colombia in particular.

After providing a background to Colombia's internal conflict in chapter two, I present the theoretical framework in chapter three. In order to analyze to what extent threats posed by drugs can explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia the following question will be addressed in chapter four:

(1) *Has there been a shift in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia a) after the end of the Cold War or b) after September 11, 2001?*

If the war on drugs has been supplanted by the war on terror this may imply that the war on drugs was more a war of rhetoric than a real war against a threat to national security. If so, it could strengthen my hypothesis that "drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics." If there has not been a real shift, my argument will be weakened.

In chapter five I bring in factors related to the geopolitical position of Colombia, namely the U.S. desire to control its resources, and, related to that, its desire to secure political stability in the Andean region. I furthermore argue that drugs and terror are inseparable because (1) drugs fuel terror and (2) the U.S. is more concerned about drugs as economic fuel for terror than as a health and/or social problem.

In chapter six I discuss the role of U.S. domestic politics in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. I argue that because the U.S. objectives in Colombia are many and there are different actors pulling in different directions, the actual policymaking is too complex for a rational, unitary actor model.

Finally, in chapter seven, I give conclusions, briefly address the future prospect of Colombia and discuss the fruitfulness of my model.

Throughout my thesis the theoretical objective will be to address: *How can theoretical approaches to international relations (realism, liberalism and constructivism) help explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia?* And moreover, *is Colombia a security threat to the U.S. in (i) a traditional way – that is military*

conflict as the defining key to security or (ii) *a wider understanding of the security term* – that is not only military threats but also political, economic, social and environmental threats?

1.1 The argument

The U.S. has been engaged in Colombia for a long time, but no single explanation is sufficient to describe this engagement.

I argue that the reasons and justification for U.S. involvement in Colombia continually shift - between anti-narcotics, anti-terror and oil interests - such that they cannot in themselves, or by themselves, explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. The reasons and justification extend beyond events that take place in Colombia. U.S. involvement in Colombia appears to be based as much, if not more so, on a particular matrix of government interests in the U.S. Moreover, I argue that the complexity of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia needs to be understood by applying a bureaucratic actor model as opposed to a rational, unitary model. Finally, although the reasons and justification may vary from one administration to another, regardless of the administration – be it Democratic or Republican – all seem to agree that the U.S. continues to have strategic interests in Colombia and should therefore remain engaged.

1.2 U.S. foreign policy – a brief introduction

Due to U.S. power and influence, the entire world has reason to be interested in U.S. foreign policy. Although Europeans, as well as Latin Americans, in general have been eager to criticize the U.S. interfering actions, the same people are often also the ones that fear U.S. isolationism. The U.S. has not always been interested in being a global actor. When the country gained its independence from the U.K. (July 4, 1776), it sought to limit its involvement in international affairs and avoid competition with foreign powers (Cameron 2002:4). This is clearly demonstrated in the farewell address by President George Washington, in which he states: “It is our true policy to

steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world” (Ibid). Other than agreeing on isolationism, however, there was no consensus among the Founding Fathers as to what principles should guide U.S. foreign policy. In fact, the differences between idealists and realists led to rival ideological camps that arguably still persist today. The idealists, on the one hand, believed that the new nation should conduct a foreign policy guided by law and reason, not power politics. Relations between nations should be guided by a code of morality. The realists, on the other hand, argued that the U.S. would have to be guided by purely national interest just like any other country (Ibid).

1.2.1 Why study U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia?

The relationship between the U.S. and Colombia dates back to Colombian independence.

In 1822, the U.S. became one of the first countries to recognize the new Colombian republic and to establish a resident diplomatic mission (Homepage of U.S. Department of State). Although Colombia and the United States had pleasant and friendly relations during the nineteenth century, relations were strained during the first two decades of the twentieth century as a result of the involvement of President Theodore Roosevelt's administration in the Panama revolt. Despite the diplomatic strain, economic ties with the U.S. were of great importance to Colombia even in the early twentieth century (The homepage of the Library of Congress).

Between 1980 and 2003, the U.S. provided Colombia with over \$3.6 billion in assistance, most of it directed to counter-narcotics or related efforts (Serafino 2003:1). In 1999, Colombia became the third largest recipient of U.S. security aid after Israel and Egypt (Chernick 2002:2).

According to the homepage of the U.S. Department of State, Colombia is the world's leading supplier of refined cocaine and a growing source of heroin. More than 90 percent of the cocaine that enters the United States is produced, processed, or transhipped in Colombia. Chernic (2002:1) argues that from the end of the Cold War

until September 11th, “the war on drugs” defined U.S. security policy in the Western hemisphere. Moreover, he claims that since September 11th, the Bush administration has subsumed the war on drugs into its wider war on terror.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical approach serves the purpose of organizing the driving factors of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia into models to help structure a very complex issue. These models serve as tools to analyze the driving forces, and are means to an end, not an end in themselves. When we view the world, we are looking through different sets of lenses and these lenses are organizing concepts (Holsti 1995:5). I have chosen to outline three different approaches to the contemporary international system: realism, liberalism and constructivism.¹ In this thesis, these three approaches are regarded as complementary rather than competing. In addition to demonstrate how U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia can be interpreted through realist, liberalist or constructivist lenses, I look at the traditional security perspective and the wider security perspective and address which, if any, of these are indeed useful for enhancing our understanding of the Colombia of today.

Realism became a dominant theory in the 1940s and 1950s by effectively critiquing the liberal idealism of the interwar period (Jackson and Sørensen 2003). Realists assume that the international system is anarchic and that states think strategically about how to survive in the international system (Mearsheimer 1995:10). National security and state survival are the values that drive the realist doctrine. Hence the national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy and the national interest precedes moral norms (Jackson and Sørensen 2003:68-69). Due to the uncertainty of the anarchic system, states fear each other and constantly seek to maximize their relative positions over other states (Mearsheimer 1995:10-12).

¹ Like Ba and Hoffman (2000:16), I am aware “that there are different versions of realism and liberalism”, and for the sake of clarity I have chosen to restrict my discussion to neo-realism and neo-liberalism. Throughout my thesis, neo-realism/neo-liberalism is therefore used interchangeably with realism/liberalism.

Traditionally, the realist school has understood security in terms of state security, and governments have used this to legitimize all actions taken in apparent defense of the nation-state. Consequently, classical definitions of security are closely tied to a state's defense of sovereign interests by military means (López 2000:8-10).

Geopolitics – the study of how geography and patterns determine power and the connection between geographical attributes and the distribution of power – can be understood as a variant of realism in the study of international politics (Østerud et al. 1997:75). Geopolitics helps us understand the driving forces behind U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

A realist would most likely argue that the U.S. is present in Colombia due to geopolitical strategy. The U.S. is located near Colombia and since Colombia is rich in oil and natural resources, which the U.S. has access to, it is in the U.S. interest that Colombia is stable and friendly, and also that undeveloped oil reserves in Colombia are developed through U.S. based or friendly multinational companies.

Liberalism contains a number of propositions, most of which derive from the domestic analogy concerning the relationship between individuals within the state (Evans and Newnham 1998:304-305). A liberalist would most likely argue that the U.S. is involved in Colombia in order to strengthen Colombia's democracy and secure human rights.

The two-level approach to foreign policy, which accounts for the significance of the domestic level in international relations, originated in the liberalist approach. Milner (1997:14) argues that the struggle for internal power and compromise dominates foreign policymaking and that it is necessary to eliminate the unitary actor assumption. In chapter six, I find it necessary to address the impact of U.S. domestic policymaking. This builds upon Milner's argument.

In the last two decades several scholars have redefined the concept of security (Lopez 2000:9) and liberalists, as opposed to traditional realists, move security out of the military sector which creates the so-called extended or "wide" security perspective (Buzan et al. 1998:1). The main argument of the proponents of a redefinition of security is that non-military threats are an important element of insecurity in today's

world (Lopez 2000:9). A liberalist could therefore open up for drugs being a security threat to the U.S.

Constructivists are reluctant to call anything objective and see research as a matter of interpretation more than explanation. Ruggie (1998:14) criticizes neo-realism and neo-liberalism for failing to explain how states acquired their current identities and interests. Whereas the two latter perspectives take rationalist models as their starting points (Goldstein and Keohane 1993:5), Wendt (1994:284) claims that a rationalist approach only makes sense when state interests really are exogenous to interaction and this is not always the case. In the study of national security, constructivists pay careful attention to the influence and effects of culture and identity on security policies and actions (Jakcson and Sørensen 2003:257). A constructivist would, arguably, study how U.S. policymakers construct Colombia to fit into the global war on terror. They could for instance find that U.S. officials create ideas about Colombian groups as international terrorist groups that are threatening the entire Andean region.

1.4 Method

In this thesis, a case study is the chosen design. Only one case has been selected and the chosen case is U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia in the post-Cold War era. A case study is useful in describing the nature of change, *how* something happens and how it is perceived. One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. Interviews and documentation of institutional policies provide us with more of a qualitative rather than a quantitative understanding of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. My case study is of a “focused interview” nature, which means that I asked my key respondents for the facts of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia as well as their opinions, as is done in the so-called “open ended” interviews (Yin 1994:84). I also followed up with certain questions derived from the case study protocol (Ibid).

1.4.1 Sources

I have used public documents and statements, organizational assessments/reports, articles in newspapers, journals and interviews as well as statements made at conferences and meetings that I attended. Interview subjects, conferences and meetings are listed in a separate list of the bibliography. I tried to build on other's assessments and insights and some times I quote them directly. Many of the written sources were retrieved from the Internet, such as from official websites and electronic archives.

In addition to interviewing three people in Oslo that have first hand experience with Colombia, I conducted interviews in both Washington D.C. and Colombia. First, I spent three weeks of September 2003 in Washington D.C. conducting interviews, research at the Library of Congress, and participating in conferences and meetings. The respondents were carefully chosen from think tanks, the government, NGOs and universities. I had contacted all of them prior to arriving and only had to confirm my appointments when I arrived in Washington D.C. I was also able to use facilities at both the American University and Georgetown University. All the interviews, except one, were carried out in English. The exception was conducted in Spanish.

All but one respondent allowed me to tape record the interview. Since I have good knowledge of English and know the American culture well from studies at an American university and from visiting the country on several occasions, I am confident that I have understood the interview subjects as well as one could expect. I transcribed approximately 160 pages. The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, as I had made an interview guide that I to a large extent followed during the interviews. However, I purposely set up the questions in a non-systematic order in an effort to discover inconsistency in the answers of the respondents. At times I also added questions and skipped others. The interviews were carried out in a somewhat informal manner, and lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours. Sometimes the location of the interview was educational in itself as I had to go through security checks and got first hand experience with some of the changes in U.S. security policy after September 11th.

Second, I had planned on going to Bogotá right after my stay in Washington, but due to financial constraints I was forced to cancel my trip. However, in March, I was unexpectedly informed that I had received a small traveling grant from non-European studies and decided to go to Bogotá in April 2004. The grant was, however, not enough to sustain me for very long and I could only afford to spend one week there even though I had arranged to stay with the family of a friend. Although it would have been an advantage to spend more than one week in Colombia, the stay was very productive. I had already built a large network of contacts before I arrived and was able to interview a number of individuals and go to one conference. Colombia is a dangerous country to travel in, but since I stayed with a Colombian family who helped me with practical arrangements, both prior to my arrival and during my stay, I had extra time for research. The subjects included an ex-guerrilla and representatives of NGOs, universities and the Colombian government. About half of the interviews were conducted in Spanish and the other half in English. I did not expect any people to speak English and since I am not fluent in Spanish I was positively surprised by the fact that a couple of the Colombians that I interviewed spoke English very well. On several occasions, I decided not to tape record the interview so that the person could speak more openly.

Overall, none of the people I interviewed objected to being quoted with full name. However, a few people wanted to confirm their quotes before I handed in my thesis. One person turned off the tape recorder during the interview because of personal safety concerns, and I have been careful not to reveal any information that could cause problems for my sources.

1.4.2 Reliability and validity

I was hoping to receive good answers from my respondents and am aware of the fact that good answers often require good questions. Hence I focused on making good questions. “Reliability” and “validity” are characteristics related to the measurement procedure (Mordal 2000:61). By “reliability”, Kvale (1997:47-55) refers to how

truthful the results are. That means to what extent the measurement procedure is dependable and consistent: whether I would have found the same answers no matter where and when I conducted the interviews. However, even if my respondents did give me the same answers at several different occasions and different places, the result does not have to be valid (Mordal 2000:62). By “validity” Kvale (1997:47-55) refers to whether the interviews study what was intended. That means the authority of the measurement for what I wanted to measure. That is, whether my findings give a correct answer and whether it measures what I wanted to measure (Mordal 2000:61). So even if my respondents did give me the same answers to the same question at different occasions, they could be lying. That would mean that my answers were reliable (since they were consistent and hence measured the story) but not valid (since the answers did not reflect reality).

I had many advantages by conducting interviews. First, by talking to people that have first-hand information on U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia I had the best opportunity to get direct answers to what I wanted to know. The fact that I conducted personal interviews also allowed for me to observe the respondents’ body language and reactions to my questions. In addition I could ask follow-up questions when that seemed necessary.

There are, of course, some drawbacks to collecting qualitative data. One of them is that people often tend to forget facts and since some of the questions required a good memory, I ran the risk of getting the wrong information for specific questions. If that happened the answers would not be correct and hence the conclusions not valid. Given these difficulties, I still believe that my general ability to think critically as I learned through many years at the University will compensate for this pitfall. In addition, I have verified all information through secondary documentation. Another danger when conducting interviews is that the researcher only interviews people that represent similar background. “Interviewing a number of different people on the same topic will quickly reveal a range of opinions, attitudes and ‘strategies’” (Mikkelsen 1995:104). I made sure to choose respondents that represented a broad variety of background. It would have been an advantage to consult more women, because “men

and women tend to have different experiences – hence opinions” (Mikkelsen 1995:104). Regrettably, I was able to interview only three women, but fortunately all three were knowledgeable and filled important positions.² In addition, I think that the fact that both of my advisors are female, and know the topic well, helped balance this.

Finally, I knew that conducting interviews in Spanish would be more challenging than carrying them out in Norwegian or English. This, however, made me prepare myself even better for these interviews. A native Spanish speaker helped me translate the questions to avoid any sort of misunderstanding and I asked my sources to repeat themselves or speak more slowly when necessary. On two occasions, I invited a Norwegian colleague (whose Spanish is better than mine) to the interview to help translate.

With regard to reliability, I am aware that people have, and represent, interests and that is what I am seeking to understand. Hence I do not regard their answers as “the truth”, but try to understand their responses in the context of theoretical framework.

1.5 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of seven chapters. The next chapter deals with Colombia’s internal conflict. The primary objective is to give the reader sufficient background to understand the context in which U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia takes place. The third chapter presents the theoretical approach applied in this thesis. That includes definitions of relevant terms and a thorough description of realist, liberalist and constructivist perspectives. The theory chapter ends with a brief introduction to the complex actor model and U.S. interests in Colombia. The fourth chapter addresses U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia from the Cold War to present and whether there has been a shift in policy due to change in global power structures after the Cold

² These were Susan Bell, the Colombian desk officer at the U.S. State Department, Julia Sweig, Senior Fellow & Deputy Director of Latin America Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and Lorianne Woodrow, Legislative Assistant to Senator Norm Coleman

War ended and increasing awareness of terror threats after September 11th. The fifth chapter addresses the role that drugs play in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia on the background of geopolitics. In addition the securitizing of drugs and terror is dealt with. The sixth chapter addresses the failure of a rational, unitary actor model to fully capture the complexities of U.S. policy towards Colombia with a discussion of the importance of U.S. domestic politics. The final chapter gives final conclusions and questions the future of U.S. involvement in Colombia and finally addresses the fruitfulness of the bureaucratic actor model.

2. Background: Colombia's internal conflict

*He was weary of the uncertainty. Of the vicious circle of that internal war that always found him in the same lace, but always older, wearier, even more in the position of not knowing why, or how, or even when.*³

2.1 Introduction

With its 42 million inhabitants, Colombia is the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico.⁴ However, despite the fact that Colombia is the size of France and Spain together, it has only half the population of these two countries combined. It is also a very diverse country. As the winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, Gabriel García Márquez has put it: “Cada colombiano es un país” which means that each Colombian is his or her own country (Pärssinen 2001:7).

Colombia has the most severe humanitarian problem in the western world. It also has the largest internal refugee problem, the most brutal human rights violations and the largest drug trafficking problem (Egeland).⁵ The Colombian conflict has lasted for more than four decades and consists of many factors. However, there are no simple answers to how and exactly when it started. In this chapter I present Colombia's internal conflict, addressing some of its more critical aspects. The aim of this chapter is to give the reader sufficient background and knowledge of the conflict in order to fully understand the arguments made in the following chapters.

2.2 Lack of democracy, social injustice, violence, and corruption

Rieser⁶ explains that Colombia has a history of weak democracy, but at the same time it is a country of very capable and sophisticated people. Pärssinen (2001:24) argues that even though Colombia's constitution is modern and democratic, the laws and the

³ Gabriel García Márquez: “One Hundred Years of Solitude” (Leech 2002:5).

⁴ <http://www.state.gov>

⁵ Jan Egeland, Lecture April 2, 2003

⁶ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy's foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

exercise of power are only found in certain areas of the country. The 1991 constitution renounced Colombia as a multi-ethnic state with freedom of speech, rights for the indigenous community (approx. 2 percent of the population) and African Colombians (approx. 30 percent of the population) (Ibid:22). Colombia has institutions that function, elections, a congress, a constitutional court, and a good press. One may call it a limited democracy, but Shifter⁷ labels it as “relatively good democracy by Latin American standard”. Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that although Colombia has free elections, candidates are filtered out beforehand by threats of violence⁸ and corruption during elections.⁹ In addition, Colombia has a very weak local democracy, which Ceballos (Ibid) claims is not due to the structure of the state, but rather the very low level of education among politicians at the local level.

According to Zarate-Laun, Colombia fulfills all the formal requisites of a democracy:

Elections are held every four years, the three branches of government function in beautiful buildings, even though in reality their powers are not separate. A string of civilian presidents sign all kinds of international treaties on human rights, women’s rights, environmental rights, children’s rights... Colombia holds its place at the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the International Labor Organization, where it has no moral problems with the fact that more labor leaders are killed in Colombia than in any other country in the world (1998:1).

Zarate-Laun (Ibid) argues that this “democracy” means only misery for the majority of its people. Taking this into consideration, it seems clear that Colombia is a weak democracy.

Colombia is a country rich in natural resources but with much social injustice. Traditionally, and still today, a small percentage of people make up the elite, and the rest have been excluded from the political, social, and economic power. In fact, 3

⁷ Interview with Michael Shifter, Michael Inter-American Dialogue September 4, 2003

⁸ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

⁹ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

percent of the people own 70 percent of the arable land (Zarate-Laun 1998:2). Because of these deep inequalities, guerrilla movements started to be formed in the late 1930s (Ibid). Nevertheless, the injustice alone does not explain the reasons behind the conflict in Colombia. As pointed out by Egeland¹⁰, Brazil's social injustice is of a much larger scale than that of Colombia, but Brazil is not facing the degree of violence that Colombia is facing. This implies that both the violence and the social injustice should be addressed.

On average, 32,000 people are killed annually in Colombia and 15-17 percent die as a result of armed conflict (Ricardo 2001:60). Colombia has a long history of violence, and the country has a large military force. According to Driver (2001:1), the country's violence stems from negative social factors such as exploitation of labor, the deep poverty of at least 60 percent of its people and the political disempowerment of more than 90 percent of its citizens.

Conflict within the ruling class has led to repeated episodes of warfare. Between 1830 and 1900 there were at least 50 armed uprisings in Colombia, dozens of wars, and five constitutions. Between 1899 and 1902, conservatives and liberals fought the savage "War of the Thousand Days" (Driver 2001:1-2). Then, after more than 40 years of Conservative governments, the Liberals won the election in 1930 due to what Pärssinen (2001:16) labels an internal split in the Conservative Party. However, the Conservatives were able to win back power. The two parties fought again in the period from 1946 until 1958 known as "La Violencia." They did not cooperate until 1958, (Driver 2001:1-2), when "Frente Nacional" (National Front) was established. This was a pact between the Liberals and the Conservatives, which stated that the president should alternate between the two parties every four-year. All other political positions were to be equally divided between these two parties. The pact lasted until the 1970s, but as the two parties focused heavily on their mutual partnership and did little for the rural areas, armed and violent movements began to

¹⁰ Jan Egeland, Lecture April 2, 2003

see daylight (Pärssinen 2001:18). Moldana (2001:33) argues that the result has been that violence is legitimized as an alternative, a politically moral activity.

Olsen argues that the origin of the violence lies in the land reform of the 1930s. He explains it as follows:

Colombia has been a fragmented and weak state with little control. The common saying is that the military cannot be everywhere. However, it turns out that the military is always in the same place as the guerrillas are. There has been, and still is, a lot of land in Colombia that is not owned by anyone. Still there are many unofficial landowners who refuse to give up land, and they keep armed guards. Interest in land is closely connected to violence in a country where the majority of the population lives in poverty.¹¹

A World Bank report estimates the cost of corruption in Colombia at US \$ 2, 6 billion annually. This is the equivalent of 60 per cent of the country's debt (Herrera et al. 2002:108). The Bank has identified corruption as the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development (The homepage of the World Bank). Nagle (2002:53) argues that corruption has been an accepted and even admired form of exerting power, influence, and control among the traditional ruling factions. In May, reports surfaced that more than \$2 million of Plan Colombia funds were discovered missing and assumed to be taken by more than 20 corrupt officers of the elite counter drug forces. Until 1999, about 1,500 police officers were sanctioned annually for various acts of corruption. In the years following, the annual average had dropped to about 450 officers (Ibid). Nagle (Ibid:23) states that the drop in numbers is not the result of less corruption, but indicates instead a failed leadership incapable of policing itself, the military, and the police forces under its command. Moreover, the importance for the present government to come to terms with this corruption that has rendered the Colombian government ineffective for decades, and has hampered the success of Plan Colombia and past aid programs (Ibid).

¹¹ Egil Olsen, the Norwegian Refugee Council. Presentation at Chateau Neuf, Oslo, March, 22, 2003

2.3 Parties

A brief outline of the actors entangled in Colombia's internal conflict is helpful. In this section I will therefore describe the four main parties in the Colombian armed conflict: the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the army, and the drug traffickers.

2.3.1 The guerrillas

The guerrillas have been given many names, such as the Marxist guerrillas, the narco-guerrillas, the terror-guerrillas and as of late even the narco-terrorists. The guerrillas were originally farmers and colonizers. According to Moleno (2001:94), the guerrillas ended up taking over many state functions, such as defining rules of land distribution and resolving family problems. Moreover, at a point the guerrillas denied the farmers to cultivate illicit drugs, because they thought the farmers were using an imperialistic strategy to undermine the guerrilla. They also started taxing coca production (Ibid). When the price was low, they fumigated the coca plant forcing the price to increase. At one point the potential for coffee to replace coca arose. However, the price for coffee fell, and it was no longer a viable alternative. Today the guerrillas hold virtual control of vast regions of the countryside where for the most of this century the only presence of the state has been the army (Zarate-Launn 1998:2).

Most of the guerrilla organizations were established between 1950 and the 1970s. These included FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), ELN (National Liberation) Army, EPL¹² (Popular Army of Liberation), ANAPO¹³, and M-19 (Movement 19 April).¹⁴

Two of these groups that were formed towards the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s remain active today. First, the FARC, which draws its primary strength from "campesinos" (peasant farmers) in the south, and second, the ELN, whose strength is greater in the north among oil workers, indigenous groups defending their

¹² Ejército Popular de Liberación came out of the Chinese revolution (Ricardo 2001:49).

¹³ ANAPO was a populist party that died with the death of its leader, Rojas Pinilla.

¹⁴ In 1973 the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril) burst on the scene (Bushnell 1993:245), but it lost its role quickly (Pärssinen 2001:22).

habitat against encroachment by the oil industry, and the Afro-Colombian population (Driver 2001:2).

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) adopted a Marxist ideology (McLean 2002:2). They consist of approximately 16,000-18,000 heavily armed fighters. There are approximately 60 FARC battalions, which are often split in two. Together, these battalions cover vast areas of the country. They support themselves financially with ransoms from kidnappings, money from the drug industry, and taxes posed on the drug industry.¹⁵

Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) was inspired by a Castro-ism mixed with liberation theology (McLean 2002:3). According to the homepage of the Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C., the ELN gained strength in the 1980s, by extorting money from oil companies operating in the northwestern region of Colombia.¹⁶ ELN is a smaller organization with approximately 4000 soldiers. According to Dunning and Wirspa (2004:11), analysts and journalists have linked the revival in the mid-1980s of the ELN to \$4 million in extortion payments reportedly received from a German contractor involved in the construction of the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline.

Some people argue that the guerrillas were created for military and economic reasons, while the farmers only joined for economic reasons (see for instance Molano 2001:93). The farmers looked upon marijuana and coca as something natural coming from heaven. The herb itself was legal and fetched for a high price, while rice and bananas had limited markets. Originally, chemists controlled the process that transformed coca into cocaine. Little by little farmers learned this professional and began to process cocaine directly. Today, both the paramilitaries and the guerrillas finance themselves by taxing plantations of coca leaf, the base ingredients for cocaine (Ibid).

¹⁵ Jan Egeland, Lecture April 2, 2003.

¹⁶ <http://www.colombiaemb.org/>

There are disagreements among researchers on whether the FARC and the ELN retain any of their ideological platforms. Some claim that they are still fighting for equality while others claim that economic interests have taken over as the motivation for their actions.

2.3.2 The paramilitaries

The many illegal privately armed rightist groups involved in political violence are known in the U.S. as “paramilitary” groups and in Colombia also as “self-defense” groups (Serafino 2001:12). Driver (2001:2) sees the creation of paramilitaries, as a response to guerrilla activities, and consisting of desperate, poor young people that were recruited with a bit of pay, a uniform and a gun. Driver (2001:2) claims that these paramilitary groups were initially financed and utilized by large landowners to defend their property against guerrilla incursions, but later drug lords also began using them to protect their illegal activities. However, these people have recently been employed by the Colombian army to do their dirty work of terrorizing the peasant farmers and community leaders who are the real focus of the present war (Ibid). The paramilitaries consist of about 10,000 fighters and are involved in the drug trade. They control around 40 percent of drug-growing regions, according to one estimate (The Economist 2003).

The paramilitaries call themselves self-defense groups, and claim, as Driver does, that they were established because of the government’s poor efforts in fighting the guerrillas. There are people in Colombia who believe that the Uribe administration uses the paramilitaries as a part of its military strategy.¹⁷

¹⁷ Egil Olsen, the Norwegian Refugee Council. Presentation at Chateau Neuf, Oslo, March 22, 2003

2.3.3 The army

A UN study reported in April 2000 that the Colombian security forces maintain an intimate relationship with death-squads, organized paramilitary forces, and either participate in their massacres directly, or by failing to take action. Moreover, these security forces “have undoubtedly enabled the paramilitary groups to achieve their exterminating objectives” (Chomsky 2000:2). Pärssinen (2001:24) argues that one still must keep in mind that the Pastrana government has fought corrupt military personnel, and that the paramilitaries and hundreds of members of the self-defense groups are in jail.

2.3.4 Narco-traffickers

In recent years, Colombian army generals have advanced the concept that narco-traffickers and guerrillas are part of the same operation; just like the U.S. government did with its promotion of “narco-guerrillas” in Latin America (Salinas 1997:3). According to Zarate-Launn (1998:3), the Colombian army is often unable to distinguish between the guerrillas and the narco-traffickers, as some of the guerrilla members take part in the narco-trafficking and narco-traffickers have also attained land by force. Hence the role of the narco-traffickers and the guerrillas some times overlap. According to Salinas (Ibid) narco-traffickers are highly opportunistic and will work with anyone willing to advance their interests. Hence many narco-traffickers have to pay taxes to the guerrillas for protection, but narco-traffickers also get the help of members of the Colombian security forces (Ibid). According to Schirmer¹⁸, researcher at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM) in Oslo, the paramilitaries are also involved in narco-trafficking. In fact, she claims that eight out of ten paramilitaries are also involved in narco-trafficking. She adds that these so-called “paras” were originally bodyguards for the narco-traffickers.

¹⁸ Jennifer Schirmer, lecture at SUM, 02.09.2004,

2.4 Manifestation of the conflict

All levels of society are affected by the conflict. Farmers, local leaders, teachers and nurses are only a few examples of groups that are often threatened. Moreover, 50 percent of all journalists killed throughout the world are killed in Colombia. Lawyers and judges use anonymous witnesses. Union leaders, policemen, election candidates and human rights activists are also directly affected by the conflict.¹⁹

One of the latest initiatives from the government was to establish a network for civilian informants consisting of one million people contributing to the new democratic security strategy, “La Seguridad Democrática” (Instefjord and Aure Hansen 2002:2). As a result, people have to be careful with what they say or do, to prevent others from making up stories that can get them in trouble. According to Javier Zúñiga, Amnesty International's Director of Strategy, “the measures included in the doctrine threaten to weaken the rule of law and the human rights of all Colombians” (Amnesty International 2002). Although Uribe’s “democratic security system” has led to fewer kidnappings and murders, Bernal²⁰ questions the system of creating informants, because the payment itself may be an incentive for people to falsely accuse innocent people. He is also skeptical of the anti-terrorist law, which gives the police full autonomy to administer justice. He believes that it is rather the regular judiciary system that should be strengthened.

On August 12th 2002, the government introduced the “Conmoción Interior”, or state of emergency to create order after Uribe was inaugurated (Dudley 2002). According to Dudley (2002), the act, would allow the government to raise tax revenue for more security spending and provide for other measures that could include more searches, seizures, and arrests. On April 4th 2003, Colombia’s Constitutional Court decided to lift the state of emergency, which had allowed for the army to serve as the

¹⁹ Egil Olsen, the Norwegian Refugee Council. Presentation at Chateau Neuf, Oslo, March, 22, 2003

²⁰ Lecture by Jaime Bernal, December 5, 2003b

highest authority, detain suspects without an arrest warrant, and wiretap telephone conversations (Deutsche Welle 2003).

2.5 Conflict from the perspective of the guerrillas and the “paras”

Just like the conflict itself is complex to explain, the issues are challenging. It seems, however, quite clear that there has been a constant battle for control over areas with valuable coca leaf plantations.

The guerrillas insist that they are fighting for a better society, whereas the paramilitaries say they are fighting to remove the guerrillas and then create a better society. The guerrillas see the conflict as a result of social, economic and political problems, and political and economic reforms are needed in order to solve the armed conflict. Furthermore, the FARC soldiers in particular tell the government that they need a specific plan presented by the government that shows visible actions against the paramilitary.

The government, represented by President Uribe, blames the guerrillas for the armed conflict and hence seems to believe that a military victory will solve the social, economic, and political problems in the country (Wærnes and Salus 2002).

In 1999, the FARC was given control over five municipalities with 117,000 inhabitants, equal to the size of Switzerland, in southern Colombia by the government led by President Pastrana. FARC does not want to negotiate until they have an area in which they can be free. They think that they will otherwise be killed. The worry comes from the experience of the 1980s when FARC members left FARC to become politically active through their representation in the Patriotic Union (UP), but ended up being killed by the thousands of paramilitaries. Historically, the political left has never had much support in Colombia. For the voters there has not been a real alternative to the liberals or conservatives (Pärssinen 2001:20). In fact, Colombia has always had two political parties whose powers have caused many wars. Zarate-Laun (1998:1) argues that these two political entities might as well be considered one party

with two heads, because there is no ideological difference between them and they hold the same position on social and economic issues.

2.6 Different interpretations

During the last decade alone, Colombia's civil war has taken 40,000 lives (Homepage of Global Exchange).

It has been stated by various sources, such as the Colombian Commission of Jurists that 75 percent of all political killings are carried out by right-wing paramilitaries, such as the AUC (Ibid). However, it is important to note that the facts seem to vary with the source.

According to the homepage of the Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C., 79 percent of human rights violations in Colombia, in the last five years, were committed by the guerrillas. On the other hand, the illegal self-defense groups (otherwise known as the paramilitaries), committed 19 percent and two percent were committed by the armed forces according to the same source. Driver (2001:1), however, provides evidence that the paramilitary forces are responsible for 70 percent of the violence in Colombia and the Human Rights Watch (2000), reports similar numbers, stating that the paramilitaries are consistently responsible for the vast majority of human rights abuses, with over 80 percent of all abuses attributed to them (Stokes 2000:3). The Center for International Policy presents numbers on its homepage, received from the Colombian Commission of Jurists, which show that the paramilitaries are responsible for 79.2 percent of the non-combatant deaths and forced disappearances, while the guerrillas, on the other hand, are responsible for 16.3 percent. The security forces are responsible for the rest (4.6%). Again, this demonstrates the importance of being aware of the interests of the source.

2.7 U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia and its critics

According to former secretary of state and assistant to the president for national security affairs, Henry Kissinger (2001:89), the civil war in Colombia was originally

started by radical Marxist groups, which later merged with the narcotics industry. These two groups, together with the narcotics industry, have ended up supplying much of the illegal drugs consumed in the U.S. The narcotics producers finance the guerrillas who, in return for the weapons they are thus able to acquire, supply safe havens for narcotics production. As a result, the guerrillas are, in many respects, better financed than the government. The government has thus far been unable to break the resulting military stalemate. Hence Kissinger claims that due to frustrations, the government has reached a point where it has granted the guerrillas safe havens. Moreover, he states that parts of the country are thus, in effect, governed by radical groups determined to overthrow the central government and by narcotics producers openly flouting the national legislation (Ibid). Moreover, Kissinger argues that a total breakdown of law and order in Colombia would have serious consequences for the U.S. He mentions that it would not only lead to a “body blow to the economic progress of the region (2002:90)”, but that it would also generate a wave of refugees into the neighboring countries and also to the U.S. He adds that it would even end the limited measures of drug trafficking control that presently exist in the country. Kissinger recognizes that the U.S. has an interest in re-establishing stability in Colombia, but claims that an exclusive emphasis on a military solution invites failure (Ibid:90-91).

2.7.1 Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia is a \$7.5 billion program.²¹ According to Salinas (2000:1), the Pastrana Administration unveiled its multidimensional proposal “Plan Colombia,” in 1999 dependent upon the provision of aid from the U.S. and European countries.

In 2000, Congress approved President Bill Clinton’s request for \$ 1, 3 billion to implement “Plan Colombia”. About 75 percent of the aid is to Colombia is military

²¹ www.state.gov

and police assistance.²² President George W. Bush later renamed the package the “Andean Regional Initiative” (Driver 2001:4).

According to U.S. Department of State, the Government of Colombia developed Plan Colombia:

As an integrated strategy to meet the most pressing challenges confronting Colombia today – promoting the peace process, combating the narcotics industry, reviving the Colombian economy, and strengthening the democratic pillars of Colombian society (Ibid).

Critics of Plan Colombia contend that the plan is actually a military aid measure to help the Colombian government battle the guerrillas (Herlinger 2002:1). Furthermore, critics of U.S. anti-drug efforts have charged that Washington pressures the Colombian government to fumigate coca crops and destroy drug laboratories in guerrilla-held areas, but intentionally overlooks other areas where the paramilitaries are involved in drug activities (Crandall 2002:92). In any case, according to the Congressional Research Service in May 2004, “Efforts to significantly reduce the flow of illicit drugs from abroad into the United States have so far not succeeded” (Barry 2004:4).

Despite the fact that the leader of the paramilitaries, Carlos Castaño, has openly expressed the paramilitary’s reliance on the drug business, the targets of Plan Colombia are guerrilla forces (Chomsky 2000:8). In fact, according to Stokes:

A report produced by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs found no evidence of the FARC’s export of drugs to the U.S. but did point to the extensive nature of drug smuggling to the U.S. by right-wing paramilitary groups in collaboration with wealthy drug barons, the armed forces, key financial figures and senior government bureaucrats (2002:2).

²² <http://www.ciponline.org>

Stokes continues by stating that,

Although the U.S.'s own agencies' reports and findings found that FARC fronts are involved in coca taxation in some areas, it becomes clear that the paramilitary death squads are far more heavily involved than the FARC in drug cultivation, refinement and transshipment of drugs to the U.S. (Ibid).

An American general answered a question about the presence of the paramilitaries in Colombia and what the position of the U.S. was regarding these groups in 2000. He answered:

You know that it is impossible to confront a guerrilla army if there are no counter-insurgent groups, which fight the way the guerrilla does. The Colombian paramilitary is the counter-insurgency that needs help, but it is the Colombian state that has to define how the counter-insurgency is, this is not our decision (De Roux 2001:78).

The soldiers feel that they are protected by the paramilitaries and thus it may be in their interest to also protect the paramilitaries.

It is well known that the paramilitary supports more than 50 percent of their activities with drug trafficking. It has also been estimated that FARC gets between 40 percent and 60 percent of its revenue from coca (Pärssinen 2001:25).

2.7.2 Difference between U.S. and Colombian interests

Isacson²³ stresses that fumigation and the oil pipeline are not the top priorities for the Colombian army or the Colombian people, who are “more interested in security for the Colombian people and regaining territory.” He points to the Uribe government's democratic security policy document, and says, “drug eradication is there, but it is not

²³ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

on page one, it is deep in there” (Ibid). Otero²⁴ claims that the armed conflict is the main priority for Colombians, but he does not think that the main interest for the U.S. is to solve it. “It is too naïve to think that” (Ibid). Lara²⁵ puts it even stronger and claims that the U.S. is not interested in peace or human rights, only oil, Venezuela, and drugs. Isacson²⁶ underlines that Uribe was positive towards most U.S. policy, apart from the International Criminal Court (ICC). He is certain that most Colombians are surprised that Colombia has not gotten a waiver for the ICC, since they have gotten waivers on practically everything else. The human rights conditions read that if Colombia does not meet the conditions, the U.S. cannot certify it and hence Colombia cannot receive money from the U.S. In other words, “Colombia is used to the U.S. looking the other way” (Ibid). He refers to the fact that Colombia was decertified many times, but the U.S. waived the penalties with the exception of two years. This arguably may give Colombian groups, such as the military, less incentive to follow international laws, such as human rights. The problem, as Isacson sees it, is that the U.S. cannot afford having its program frozen over a few cases, and most Colombians are aware of that. In fact, on one or two occasions, some accounts were empty and programs were discontinued. The U.S. then asked for Colombia to hand over those generals that were breaking human rights, so that they could issue a certification document that said there had been progress. The Colombians refused and waited (Ibid).

2.8 The consequences of the conflict

The armed conflict in Colombia has had disastrous consequences for a large proportion of the population. First, it has led to 2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Pärssinen 2001:24). People have been forced to move for many reasons. Some of these people are peasants who have been terrorized by the paramilitaries,

²⁴ Interview with Andrés Otero, minister of interior for six months in the Pastrana administration, April 19, 2004

²⁵ Interview with Alberto Lara, Human Rights Lawyer and advisor for President Uribe, April 20, 2004

²⁶ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

accusing them of connections to the FARC. As a result, their property has been stolen or their houses have been burned. Others have had to find new land, because fumigation destroyed their crops. The fumigation does not only affect the farmers that produce coca; producers of for instance banana and beans have also become victims of this policy, which originally was intended to stop the drug production.

The ecological catastrophe does not end here. Chemicals used in the process of making cocaine also destroy the diversity in the parks and the natural reserves in Colombia (Pärssinen 2001:25).

The conflict also affects the neighboring countries: Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru and Brazil (Pärssinen 2001:28).²⁷ They are affected in various ways, for instance by Colombian refugees crossing their borders and by fights between civilians and armed groups in the border areas. In 1995, guerrillas attacked Ecuadorian military and police units, and paramilitary forces have reportedly pursued guerrillas across the border into Panama and Venezuela (Serafino 2001:6-7). Colombia's neighbors have also expressed serious concern over the effect of Plan Colombia on their own national security, and declined to support it. Moreover, border states have ramped up security along their frontiers to discourage refugees and combatants from leaving Colombia (Nagle 2002:36). General Hill²⁸ states that Colombia's problems are not only Colombia's problems. He says that after three efforts Ecuador finally invited him to discuss the situation. Peru and Colombia, however, have excellent relations around the border while Brazil is more aggressive, placing 5000 people out on the border. Panama does not have anything at the border, only some corporations, and finally there is Venezuela, which Colombia is not happy with. Venezuela is flat and open and easy to get into across the border. Hommes²⁹ says that Colombia has notified the Andean group that Colombia will act independently if other countries in the Andean group create obstacles for Colombia.

²⁷ See map page VI

²⁸ James Hill, General, U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September 10, 2003

²⁹ Rudolf Hommes, former finance minister of Colombia, lecture September 10, 2003

When Hommes was in Argentina he sensed a growing isolation of Colombia. “Latin America thinks that Colombia is a strange case”, he says. He adds that he realized that just because Colombians are Latin Americans does not mean that they agree with other Latin American countries. Still, he admits, “Colombia needs its neighbors such as Mexico.”

2.9 Summary of chapter two

Colombia is a country with a high degree of social injustice, violence, and corruption in addition to a weak democracy. Yet there are no simple answers to how and when exactly it started. The guerrillas, the paramilitaries, the army, and the drug traffickers all play a part in the internal conflict that has lasted for more than forty years.

3. Theoretical framework

*We are a nation of rock-solid realism and clear-eyed idealism.*³⁰

3.1 Introduction

There are many theoretical approaches that seek to explain the driving forces of foreign policy. In this chapter, I will first provide definitions on the following four relevant concepts: foreign policy, national interests, security, and intervention. These concepts will provide the basis for further analysis. Second, I will introduce U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia by looking at U.S. objectives in the country. I will then present the theoretical approaches that will be used in this thesis: realism, liberalism, and social constructivism. This chapter ends with an introduction to the bureaucratic actor model as I argue that the complexity of U.S. domestic politics must be addressed in order to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

3.1.1 Defining “foreign policy”

Cameron (2002:xxi) defines “foreign policy” as “a consistent course of actions followed by one nation to deal with another nation or region, or international issue.” The phrase “a consistent course of actions” implies that one is focusing on steady foreign policy rather than irregularities. This will provide a logical starting point when it comes to studying U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

3.1.2 Defining “national interests”

According to Cameron (2002:xxi), “a country’s foreign policy is usually aimed at preserving or promoting its economic and political interests abroad and its position in

³⁰ George Bush senior in “State of the Union Message”, 1991 URL:
<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/P/gb41/speeches/su91ghwb.htm>

the world.” This definition seems to accord with the viewpoints of neo-realist and neo-liberal scholars, who assume that states want a combination of power, security, and wealth (Ruggie 1998:9). Milner (1997:16) distinguishes between interests and preferences of political actors and defines interests as “fundamental goals, which largely concern maximizing the chances of retaining office” and preferences refer to “the specific policy that political actors believe will maximize their chances of reelection.” The self-interest of the politician and a state’s national interest do not necessarily coincide. Moreover, Milner (Ibid) argues that there is unlikely to be a unified view of the “national interest,” and that the political leaders need to consider both the conflicting interests among different pressure groups and the electoral consequences of each choice.

With regard to U.S. national interest in Colombia, it seems natural to assume that the U.S. has several interests. The Democratic Senator Joseph Biden claims that the U.S. has a national interest in helping Colombia because it is the source of many of the drugs that are poisoning Americans (Stokes 2002b). Other important national interests could be socioeconomic/security needs.

Social constructivists agree with the fact that national interests often are the driving forces behind states’ foreign policy. However, whereas neo-realist and neo-liberal scholars consider states’ interests to be permanent, social constructivists argue that state interests are defined in the context of internationally held norms and understanding about what is good and appropriate (Finnemore 1996:1-2)

For the analysis that follows, national interests will be assumed to be a compromise between on the one hand the social constructivist definition and on the other the neo-realist and neo-liberal definition. Norms are hence influencing what states perceive as rational and in their national interest. This is in accordance with social constructivism and Finnemore’s definition of national interests.

3.1.3 Defining “security”

Evans and Newnham (1998:490) state that historically, security has been a core value and an ultimate goal of state behavior. Moreover, analyses of security in a foreign policy context traditionally concentrated on the military dimension. The end of the Cold War has allowed for a widening of the security agenda to include ideas about political, economic, social, and environmental security to sit alongside the more traditional military dimension (Gleditch 2001). The question is: Is the U.S. interested in Colombia because it poses a *security* threat to its country. It seems clear that Colombia does not present a traditional security threat to the U.S., meaning that the risk of Colombia going to war against the U.S. is very small. Drugs and terror arguably present a more real threat to U.S. security. Hence I open up for a liberal and social constructivist approach in understanding security. This will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter five.

3.1.4 Defining “intervention”

The word “intervention” covers a variety of situations where one actor intervenes in the affairs of another. Østerud (1991) lists military intervention as one of five main foreign policy tools. The others are: mediation, crisis diplomacy, propaganda, economic pressure, and payment.

Evans and Newnham (1998:279-280) argue that traditionally intervention has been constrained by the sovereignty principle, and though the term has been used to describe American foreign policy in the decades following World War II³¹ there is no consensus on whether or not the U.S. is actually intervening in Colombia. According to Levite et al. (1992:5) intervention means “to interfere, usually by force or threat of force, in another nation’s internal affairs.” Based on this definition, the people that were interviewed have a firm bases for their argument that the U.S. is not intervening

³¹ See for instance Kegley and Wittkoph 1996: 98

in Colombia as the U.S. is not in Colombia by force. This definition will be the source for my understanding of the word “intervention” in the further analysis.

3.2 U.S. objectives in Colombia

Tickner (2003a:2) argues that the drug issue has been Washington’s most strategic objective in Colombia since the mid-1980s. President Ronald Reagan, through National Security Directive 221, did in fact declare that illicit drugs constituted a lethal threat to the U.S. national security, which has led to a militarization of the drug problem (Ibid:19-20). Sullivan (2003:2), on the other hand, emphasizes that Colombia remains of paramount concern to the U.S. because of the threat to the Colombian democracy posed by terrorist activity. During a lecture organized by Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), on September 10th 2003, General for the Southern Command, James Hill confirmed that the Southern Command is fighting local and global terrorism and that the ELN, the FARC and the AUC are all on the State Department’s list of international terrorists. He labeled the groups “narco-terrorists” and said that they are everywhere in Colombia and even across the border. He also said that the Islamic extremist groups Hizbullah and Hamas have support in Latin America. Furthermore, he claimed that the Islamic radical groups and those in Latin America are “in practice the same groups”. General Hills declared that one cannot separate “those going after drugs” and “those going after terror”. Hence General Hill argues that, in Colombia, drugs and terror go hand in hand therefore the U.S. should not focus on one without the other. In chapter four, I will examine whether the importance of drugs as a driving factor of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia has shifted after (1) the end of the Cold War and (2) after September 11th 2001 and what role terror plays in this picture. I argue that both drugs and terror are important factors driving U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, but that geopolitical factors also must be considered.

Tickner (2003a:2-3) argues that the realist tradition in international relations has largely inspired U.S. strategies to address the drug problem. Despite U.S. strong influence by realism, Colombia does not seem to fit into the traditional security threat,

as Colombia is not likely to wage war against the U.S. Drugs and terror arguably present more of a threat to the U.S., which is in line with the neo-liberal understanding of security threats. Nevertheless, the U.S. primarily applies traditional realist methods when approaching the problem of drugs. That is to say, despite the non-traditional threat posed by drugs, the U.S. applies primarily militant methods. Some have argued that this is causing the U.S. to fail in its objective of fighting drugs. This critic, however, assumes a singular U.S. objective in Colombia. I, however, argue that the U.S. has multiple, often competing interest, in Colombia.

According to the homepage of U.S. Department of State, the U.S. objectives in Colombia are:

To support the Colombian Government's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions, promote respect for human rights and the rule of law, foster socio-economic development, address immediate humanitarian needs, and end the threats to democracy posed by narcotics trafficking and terrorism (Ibid).

The content of the U.S. supported Plan Colombia, as "a Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and the Strengthening of the State" confirms these objectives. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State believes that

Plan Colombia will help Colombia reinvigorate its economy, enhance its governing capability, discourage human rights abuses, and reduce the money available to guerrillas and paramilitaries from drug trafficking (Ibid).

These objectives of strengthening democracy and promoting respect for human rights, according to the neo-liberalist way of looking at the world, would arguably be secured through cooperation and peace initiatives. However, as noted, the U.S. applies largely a militant approach as a means to achieve these objectives.³² In other words, if these

³² Clinton did focus on negotiation as well, which may be one example of an individual difference between him and President Bush.

are in fact its objectives in Colombia, the U.S. is applying a realist approach in order to achieve neo-liberal goals. Thus I do not find neo-realism or neo-liberalism alone, as sufficient in explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

Could it, however, be the case that these neo-liberalist goals serve as a rhetorical tool to reach neo-realist goals? The neo-realist goals could for instance be to secure U.S. geopolitical interests. This will be addressed in a realist perspective, and analyzed more thoroughly in chapter five. The threats posed by drugs will also be taken up on the background of geopolitics. Here I address the hypothesis that drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, but that the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics. I also argue that U.S. rhetoric, focusing on threats posed by drugs, is used consciously, in order to create support for U.S. geopolitical interests in Colombia. This could mean that the rational theory model on which neo-realists and neo-liberalists base their worldviews is incomplete in explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

Mutimer (1997:193) claims that there are several problems with a rational theory because the problem, interests, and possible solutions are shaped, at least, in part, metaphorically.

A problem is not presented to policy makers fully formed but is, rather, constituted by actors in their (discursive) practices. This practically constituted image of a security problem shapes the interests states have at stake in the problem, and the forms of solution that can be addressed to resolve it (Ibid:194).

Mutimer's statement is in line with a constructivist approach to security issues. Hence I turn to social constructivism and its emphasis on language and ideas in understanding U.S. foreign policymaking towards Colombia. First, however, I will step back and define realist and liberalist perspectives, in order to provide a basic understanding so that the perspectives can later be used to more effectively analyze this complex issue.

3.3 The theoretical approach

According to both realists and liberalists, the main actors in world politics are states, and states seek certain objective interests (national interests) (Jackson and Sørensen 2003:258). Both also take the existence of international anarchy for granted and they stipulate that the identities and interests of states are given – *a priori* and exogenously (Ruggie 1998:9). Since about 1980, realism and liberalism have both produced “neo” variants: neo-realism and neo-liberalism (Ibid:3)³³ and due to similarities between them, such as both approaches assuming that states are rational and unitary actors, Ruggie analyzes the two theories together under the term “neo-utilitarianism”.

Nevertheless, there are differences between the two approaches and according to Mearsheimer (1995:7), realists and liberals disagree on whether institutions (e.g. the UN) markedly affect the prospects for international stability. Realists do not think that institutions are important, and claim that they are basically a reflection of power distribution in the world. Hence they are based on the self-interest calculations of the great powers and they have no independent effect on state power. Liberalists, on the other hand, argue that institutions can alter state preferences and therefore change state behavior (Mearsheimer 1995:7).

The constructivists, as opposed to neo-realists and neo-liberalists, seem reluctant to call anything objective. Ruggie (1998:14) criticizes the so-called neo-utilitarians because they provide no answer to how states came to acquire their current identity and the interests that are assumed to come along with it. In 1992, another constructivist, Alexander Wendt, captured the core of international constructivism in the following remark: “Anarchy is what states make of it.” In other words, states interpret one another in their relations and, in doing so; construct the international anarchy that defines their relations (Jackson and Sørensen 2002:258). State A may be considered to be an enemy by state B simply based on state B’s perceptions of state A, which led to the conclusion that “state A is a rival”.

³³ Ruggie actually refers to neo-realism and *neo-liberal institutionalism*, but to avoid confusion I refer to the latter as neo-liberalism, as Ewans and Newnham (1998:361) state that neo-liberalism is sometimes referred to as neo-liberal institutionalism.

It is possible to picture many different scenarios explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Neo-realists would most likely explain U.S. presence in Colombia based on geopolitical strategy. That is, the U.S. is interested in a stable “neighborhood” because that would influence the U.S. access to Colombian oil and natural resources. A neo-liberalist on the other hand, may claim that the U.S. is engaged in Colombia because it wants to strengthen the Colombian democracy. The problem is that both perspectives provide only partial explanations to the reason why the U.S. is engaged in Colombia. For this reason, I find it useful to also look at constructivism. Finnemore (1996:27) claims that, as these two theories are “grossly incomplete,” constructivism serves as a complementary - rather than competing – theoretical approach to realism and liberalism. Her main argument is that states may not always know what they want. Social constructivists are concerned with the impact of cultural practices, norms of behavior, and social values on political life and reject the notion that these can be derived from calculations of interests (Finnemore 1996:15). Wæver asks:

How do ideas about security develop, enter the realm of public policy debate and discourse and, eventually, become institutionalized in hardware organizations, roles and practices? Are they socially constructed; a so-called worst-case scenario of what is observed and what is imagined (1995:1-2)?

In the case of Colombia, *how* did the U.S. arrive at the conclusion that Colombia poses a threat to its neighbors? Has something changed in the international system, or can it be explained based on domestic issues? Buzan et al. (1998) present two different views of security studies: the one of the old military and state-centered view of the traditionalists and the one of the so-called “extenders.” I will address both the traditional and the extended security approach. The former is associated with neo-realism while the latter is associated with neo-liberalism. As opposed to the two previous perspectives, which focus on security as an objective condition, social constructivists argue that security can be analyzed as an inter-subjective phenomenon;

as a social construct (Miniotaite 1999:9-10). All three approaches to security will be presented in the next section, under the respective perspectives.

3.3.1 Realist perspectives

Realism rose to a position of academic pre-eminence in the 1940s and 1950s by effectively criticizing the liberal idealism of the interwar period (Jackson and Sørensen 2002). According to Mearsheimer (1995:10), realists assume that the international system is anarchic and that states think strategically about how to survive in the international system. The values that drive realist doctrine and realist foreign policy are national security and state survival, and the national interest is the final arbiter in judging foreign policy and these precede moral norms (Jackson and Sørensen 2002:68-69). The anarchic system leads to states fearing each other and states constantly seeking to maximize their relative positions over other states. States can never be certain about the intentions of other states, hence they rely on self-help and will only cooperate if they may obtain relative gains or if they are concerned about other states breaking the common rules (Mearsheimer 1995:10-12). From this, follows that realists do not see international organizations as important, and they serve only as a tool for powerful states to control their interests.

Geopolitics can be understood as a variant of realism in the study of international politics (Østerud et al. 1997:75). To what degree is U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia influenced by geopolitics? According to Østerud (1991:324-325), geopolitics is deterministic in the sense that the surroundings, size, and resources to a country are important in its foreign policy. Ewans and Newnham (1998:197-198) refer to the German word “geopolitik,” which means the exploitation of knowledge to serve the purposes of a national regime. German geopolitics was an overt and subjective policy science designed to further the nationalistic interests of the state. In my further analysis, geopolitics will be interpreted in the same way as the word “geopolitik” when analyzing U.S. geopolitical strategy with regard to Colombia.

Christman et al. (2004:6) argue that based on the definition of failing states by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), each nation in the Andean region is either failing or potentially failing. Moreover, they claim that this means that the region could pose a serious threat to the U.S. goal of achieving democracy, prosperity, and security in the hemisphere (Ibid). In my analysis, I argue that due to U.S. geographic location, the political and economic instability in the Andean region has become a source of widespread concern to U.S. policymakers and influences U.S. foreign policy making towards Colombia. Moreover, according to Driver (2002:3), Colombia has the largest undeveloped oil deposits in the Americas, and Stokes (2002b:4) argues that Washington and U.S. corporate interests have a mutual desire to increase access to Colombia's markets. Instability in the Andean region would influence U.S. interests in Colombia. Hence it is in the U.S. interest to make the region safer and easier to access.

Neo-realism is referred to as a modified version of realism (Østerud 1991:283) and neo-realists maintain that the actors in world politics are power-seeking, security-conscious states (Ba and Hoffman (2003:19). According to Kenneth Waltz, the best international relations theory is a neo-realist system theory that focuses centrally on the structure of the system, on its interacting units, and on the continuities and changes of the system. Structures more or less determine actions (Jackson and Sørensen 2003: 84). Jackson and Sørensen argue that

Waltz' image of the role of state leaders in conducting foreign policy comes close to being a mechanical image in which their choices are shaped by the international structural constraints that they face (Ibid:86).

This means that according to Waltz, the structure of the international system is the factor that explains a change in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia rather than domestic factors.

Neo-realists, equate security with military issues and the use of force and López (2000:8-10) explains that traditionally security has been understood in terms of state

security and governments have used that as an excuse to legitimize all actions taken in apparent defense of the nation-state. Consequently, classical definitions of security are closely tied to a state's defense of sovereign interests by military means. The above is due to the fact that the study of international security has mostly been the domain of the realist school. Most traditionalists insist on military conflict as the defining key to security and are not prepared to loosen their focus of the centrality of the state as the main actor in security analysis (Buzan et al. 1998:3). Stephen Walt gives perhaps the strongest statement on the traditionalist position. He defines security studies as "the study of the threat, use, and control of military force" (Ibid).

3.3.2 Liberalist perspectives

Liberalism covers a fairly broad perspective. Evans and Newnham (1998:304-305) refer to the liberal theory of international relations that dates post-Second World War. This theory contains a number of propositions, most of which derive from the domestic analogy concerning the relationship between individuals within the state: (1) Peace can best be secured through the spread of democratic institutions on a world-wide basis, (2) A belief in natural harmony of interests, (3) Judicial established procedures will settle disputes, and (4) Collective security would replace notions of self-help.

Evans and Newnham argue that:

Liberalism, honestly and self-consciously, intends to work for a brave new world where human rights and the well being of individuals are given a higher priority than state's rights and the narrower conceptions of national interest that characterize the more traditional approaches (Ibid:305-306).

During the Cold War, U.S. policy towards Latin America in general (arguably at times only in theory) was focused on spreading democracy. This derives directly from proposition (1) that peace can best be secured through the spread of democratic institutions on a worldwide basis. Some people wanted the U.S. to be passive and

simply be a good example to follow while others wanted the U.S. to be strongly involved in opposing the spread of communism throughout the continent. Proponents of the latter were also those that had the most influence and, thus impacted U.S. policy in Latin America the most. Proposition (2), which contains a belief in natural harmony of interests, does not go very far in explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia - at least not until terror became a core focus. Until then, Americans were primarily concerned with halting the drug flow to the U.S., whereas Colombians worried more about the different insurgent groups in their country. Hence, there did not seem to be a natural harmony of interests as proposed by the liberals. However, although it appears as if the “War on Terror” is an interest that the two countries share, the truth may be that the two countries share “mutual grounds” insofar as they both fight terror but their interests and goals may be different. Concerning proposition (3), the U.S. has been engaged lately in establishing judicial procedures in Colombia with the belief that it may help settle disputes. Finally, with regard to the proposition that collective security would replace notions of self-help (proposition (4)), this at least seems to apply to the post-Cold War period, as the U.S. has become more engaged in Colombia’s security problems, which could have a spill-over effect on the region and hence also on the U.S., rather than only the internal problems that drugs create within the U.S.

In the last two decades several scholars have been working on the idea of redefining the concept of security. The main argument of the proponents of a redefinition of security has been that non-military threats are an important element of insecurity in today’s world (Lopez 2000:9). Liberalists, as opposed to traditional realists, move security out of the military sector - the so-called extended security perspective (Buzan et al. 1998:1). Nils Petter Gleditsch argues that,

The debate on a new and extended security term is in large degree based in the idea that there are other threats against security - political, economic, social and environmental – that should have as high of a priority as war and threats against integrity of territory (2001:108).

Gleditch (2001:96) distinguishes between five types of security, of which three of them relate to U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.³⁴ First, political security is associated with democratizing action. Existential threats are traditionally defined in terms of the constituting principle (sovereignty, but sometimes also ideology) of the state. If the Colombian government supports terror, that may be a threat to the U.S. but President Uribe has emphasized on several occasions that he supports the U.S. in its war on terror.

Within the second type, economic security, the elements of economic cooperation and reciprocal dependence are important. Colombia is the U.S. seventh largest oil supplier and its fourth largest trading partner in Latin America. U.S. firms have provided some 40 percent of Colombia's foreign direct investment, of which petroleum investments are an important part (Serafino 2001:5-6). Within the past decade, oil companies have discovered and begun exploitation of significant petroleum reserves in Colombia, and estimates of potential reserves suggest that the country may be an important source of petroleum for the U.S. in the future. The lack of security, however, is viewed as discouraging further trade and investment (Ibid) In fact the continuing conflict has economic effects on foreign businessmen trading with Colombia and on foreign investors (Ibid). Neo-liberalists would argue that Colombia and the U.S. have mutual interests in economic gains from trade and cooperation (Ba and Hoffman 2003). Economic progress in Colombia would mean more resources to combat drugs and terror, which in turn may lead to increased stability in Colombia. Hence the U.S. would increase its access to Colombian oil.

Third, social security may refer to a U.S. identity that drugs are something bad for the U.S. society. Drugs lead to health problems and higher crime rates. In addition, the U.S. has an interest in maintaining a stable Latin America in general as it regards its "sphere of influence". Within the past two years, the growth of Colombia's leftist guerrilla groups and paramilitary organizations has threatened the political and

³⁴ The first is conflict and security, which is closely related to the traditional/realist security term. Since it is almost impossible to imagine Colombia attacking the U.S. in the near future, Colombia cannot be said to pose a threat to the U.S. in the traditional sense of the term. The last type he refers to is environmental security.

economic stability of not only Colombia but also its neighbors. This has become a source of widespread concern for U.S. policymakers (Serafino 2001). A spillover from the Colombian conflict to other neighboring countries in the region may lead to the U.S. losing some credibility, or (at least the U.S. fears this). In other words, Colombia has become a sort of show-case for the U.S.: an example of a success story.

The two-level approach to foreign policy, which accounts for the significance of the domestic level in international relations, originated in the liberalist approach. According to Milner, (1997:14) the struggle for internal power and compromise dominates foreign policymaking. “International politics and foreign policy become part of the domestic struggle for power and the search for internal compromise” (Ibid). Hence she claims it necessary to eliminate the unitary actor assumption and assume that most politics – both domestic and international – are non-hierarchical but rather polyarchic. Thus when identifying the domestic factors, it is important to understand that there are many different factions that make up the aggregation that leads to one single foreign policy. Milner (Ibid:27) argues that domestic politics and international relations are inextricably related. The U.S. powerful international position influences its internal politics and economics. Equally, its domestic situation shapes its behavior in foreign relations. One of the reasons American foreign policy is affected by domestic affairs is the Constitution’s system of checks and balances. The power is separated between the executive, the legislative and the judicial branch. The system was designed to prevent the president or the Congress from acquiring unrestricted power and, according to Cohen (1999:1), the document’s lack of a clear definition of these two branches’ specific responsibilities, the framers of the American constitution guaranteed perpetual tension between the executive and the legislative branch as each attempted to expand its power at the expense of the other’s.

An illustration of the importance of analyzing both external and domestic factors in the case of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is exemplified by Crandall (2002:108-130). He refers to U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia during a specific election year when few Congress members wanted to be portrayed as soft on

drugs and “the U.S. *had* to decertify at least one major drug-producing country in order to soothe its critics in Congress” (Ibid).

Based on Milner’s rejection of the unitary actor model, some may argue that differences between President Bush Junior and President Clinton’s foreign policy could be explained by the fact that they are answering to different parties. Others may argue that individual differences may have more explanatory power. Whereas Clinton was not running for reelection at the time of Plan Colombia’s start, Bush is now running for reelection. This difference, arguably, affects the two presidents’ self-interest, and may partly explain differences in their policymaking. The purpose of addressing this is to find out what influence individuals or groups may have on U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia and if so how that can be explained through theoretical lenses.

There are arguably different interests between the different U.S. departments such as the State Department and the Defense Department, as well as disagreement about interests within any department. Carpenter (2003:43) provides one example. In June 1988, the Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci stated that the primary role of the Defense Department was to protect and defend the U.S. from armed aggression. Nevertheless, with the end of the Cold War and the Soviet threat, the Pentagon saw the drug war as a plausible alternative mission (Ibid:44) and perhaps also as alternative employment.

With regard to political parties, foreign policy in the U.S. has traditionally not been subject to high levels of institutional and party competition. Few foreign policy issues actually divide neatly along party lines. On the contrary, the far right and the far left have often joined forces to support isolationist or protectionist policies. There has been an increasing fragmentation of foreign policy in Congress with changing coalitions often able to block administration policies or even the majority position in Congress. In addition, a decline in the prestige of the foreign policy committee accompanied by the growing perception that most foreign policy issues do not interest voters has given most Congress members little incentive to take an active role in this area (Cameron 2002:67-69). Nonetheless, presidents do feel pressured at times from

various domestic holds. Former president Clinton was criticized by some congressmen for being “soft” on drugs, and disregarding warnings of his advisers (Carpenter 2003:55).

Nevertheless, with regard to the influence by individuals, studies of public attitudes conclude that the vast majority of people – even in highly literate societies – are “unknowledgeable, uninterested, and apathetic with regard to most issues of world affairs” (Holsti 1995:261). Moreover, estimates of the size of the attentive public range from one to fifteen percent (Ibid:261-262). Based on these figures, one may argue that American voters are no different with regard to U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia than “the vast majority of people.” However, Tickner (2003b:78) argues that “drugs and, more importantly, terrorism occupy a crucial discursive function in support of American identities and values.” In my analysis I show that rhetoric appealing to American identities and values has been a tool for policy makers in obtaining support for U.S. foreign policy. Moreover, Holsti (1995:265) emphasizes that public opinion is not usually an inchoate mass of millions of people. On the contrary, “opinions” are often aggregated and mobilized by interest groups and political parties. Consequently, I expect that people who are in fact interested in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, and people who have a vested economic interest in the country, will try to influence the policymakers through for instance interest groups and political parties.

In addition to political groups and individuals within the U.S. influencing U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, there are also Colombian actors that exert influence on U.S. foreign policy towards their own country. The Colombian Ambassador to the U.S., Moreno, as well as President Uribe and former President Pastrana, have all been influential in the relationship between Colombia and the U.S. According to the homepage of The Sixth International Financial Fraud Convention in Dublin in 2002,

Ambassador Moreno has overseen a dramatic improvement in Colombian-U.S. bilateral relations during his tenure. He has been building strong bipartisan

support in the U.S. Congress for passage of more than one billion U.S. assistance programs for Colombia.³⁵

Specifically, Tickner (2002:365) argues that Moreno played a very crucial role during the Plan Colombia process. She claims that the package would not have been approved by the U.S. without the lobbying done by the Colombian Embassy in Washington D.C. In addition, Uribe's anti-drug and anti-terror strategies largely coincide with those of Bush. In my analysis, I will argue that individual Colombian actors have influenced and continue to influence U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

Finally, whereas neo-realists, with their focus on states existing in an anarchical context, argue that international organizations such as the UN and the EU have little importance per se, neo-liberalists are less pessimistic about the implications of anarchy and ascribe importance to international organizations when states have mutual interests (Ba and Hoffman 2003:19). Moreover, they claim that organizations play a crucial role in helping states to trust other states (Ibid:24). What sort of influence do the UN and EU have on U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia?

According to Christman et al. (2004:22), the Colombian crisis can only be met with sufficient financial and political resources if the international community collaborates. In fact, the UN is present in Colombia with 15 offices within sectors such as human rights, alternative development, children, women and internally displaced persons (Molano 2001:104). According to Russell (2002:167), there was a strong perception in Europe that Plan Colombia was a thinly veiled U.S. anti-drug plan and that European support would send the wrong message to the Colombian people. Nevertheless, according to the EU homepage, "the Andean region is the only one in the world with which the EU has a special EU-CAN High Level Dialogue on drugs." This "drugs" dialogue was initiated in 1995 and it has led to agreements on

³⁵ <http://www.iffc.org/speakers/biog.htm>

fundamental principles, such as shared responsibility for addressing the drug problem (Ibid).

In 2001, the EU announced an aid package amounting to more than € 330 million to Colombia (including € 140 million from the Commission to be committed between 2001 and 2006) (Ibid). Moreover, like terrorism and illegal immigration, the fight against illegal drug trafficking was listed as a priority for police cooperation in the Maastricht Treaty. Since the early 1990s it has been increasingly incorporated into the EU's foreign relations, as part of the EU's overall drug strategy (Smith 2003:180). Smith (2003:180) argues that the EU's comprehensive approach to the fight against illegal drug trafficking, based on civilian instruments, puts it at odds with the U.S. "war on drugs", which has involved the use of military force. In Colombia the U.S. provides military aid to help end the internal conflict and to counter drug-trafficking. The EU, however, has never formally criticized the U.S. approach (Ibid). The EU does not have the same geopolitical interest in Colombia as does the U.S. and hence has fewer incentives for involvement. This argument will be presented in chapter five.

Neo-liberalism, so far, with its expansion of security threats, seems to provide a better explanation for U.S. motivation than neo-realism because neo-liberalism accounts for extended threats such as drugs. Neo-liberalism is particularly interesting to explain U.S foreign policy towards Colombia with regard to the economic sector (worse business conditions) and the societal sector (loss of credibility if the Colombian crisis has a spill-over effect on the neighboring countries). The U.S. is, however, dealing with these none-traditional threats in a seemingly neo-realist manner. That is, the U.S. applies military methods to deal with drugs and terror as opposed to mediation and peaceful approaches that would be more in line with a neo-liberalist approach.

3.3.3 Social constructivism

Constructivists agree with neo-realists and neo-liberalists that states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory. As opposed to neo-realists,

however, they claim that the key structures in the state system are inter-subjective rather than material and that state identities and interests are constructed by these social structures and not given exogenously to the system by human nature of domestic politics (Wendt 1994:385). Whereas neo-realism assumes that states have the same a priori interests (self-interests), constructivism instead assumes that the selves, or identities, of states are a variable; they likely depend on historical, cultural, political, and social context (Hopf 1998:176). As a superpower, the U.S. has a particular set of interests different from those implied by the identity “European Union member” (Ibid). “The preferences and interests of actors are explicitly part of the explanatory framework rather than exogenously given” (Krause and Williams 1997:xviii). Those shared beliefs compose and express the interests and identities of people; e.g. the way people conceive themselves in their relations with others. Constructivists focus on the ways those relations are formed and expressed: e.g. by means of collective social institutions, such as state sovereignty, “which have no material reality but exist only because people collectively believe they exist and act accordingly” (Jackson and Sørensen 2002:253-254).

Constructivists are among those scholars who see research as a matter of interpretation more than explanation. Realism and liberalism take rationalist models as their starting points but Wendt (1994:284) notes that a rationalist approach only makes sense when state interests really are exogenous to interaction and this is not always the case.

Kubáľková (2001:61-62) argues that constructivists study rule-based relations and institutions and identify agent, structures and rules. According to her, the constructivists assume that the content of these rules are made by agents so that they can create the world in a certain way (Ibid). She also refers to the work by Onuf who, shows that rules derive from speech acts and depend on speech acts. Hence language and rules together (they can never be separated) are the medium through which agents and structures may be said to constitute each other (Ibid:64).

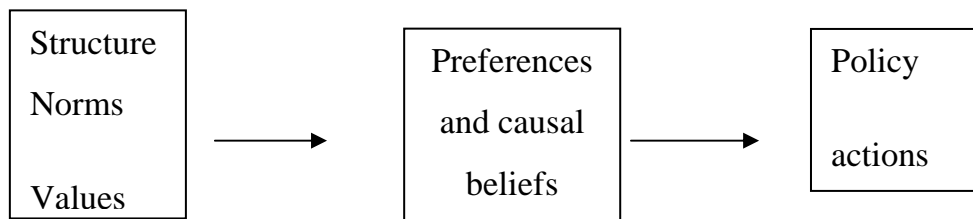


Figure 3.1: social constructivists v. rationalists and input on policy actions

Figure 3.1 illustrates one of the key differences between the social constructivist and rationalist approaches. Whereas neo-realists and neo-liberalists view state preferences and causal beliefs to be permanent and rooted in self-interest only, social constructivists argue that these preferences are often influenced and changed by societal structures, norms and values. States understand others according to the identity they attribute to them, while simultaneously reproducing their own identity through daily social practice (Hopf 1998:175). Foreign policy is an identity-making tool that erects boundaries between self and the other, defining the national interests in the process (Kubáľková 2001:227). The construction of the other can be divided into two groups: allies and enemies. The enemies tell a state what its “identity” is not, while an ally is a positive identification of what constitutes the self. States’ interests are not exogenously given, and he considers language very seriously. He argues that the point of demonizing the enemy is to reproduce a given representation of U.S. identity (Ibid:244). Lavik (2004), a professor in psychiatry, refers to an analysis done by Harold Lasswell in 1927, which addresses the distinction between “us” and “them”.³⁶ This distinction makes it clear who the enemies are, and hence who to hate.

In the study of national security, constructivists pay careful attention to the influence and effect that culture and identity have on security policies and actions (Jakcson and Sørensen 2003:257). Buzan et al. (1998:24) argue that sometimes an issue can be presented as an existential threat without necessarily being of such a

³⁶ My own translation

character. They claim that traditionally, by saying “security”, a state representative declares an emergency condition thus claiming a right to use whatever means are necessary to block a threatening development (Ibid:21). Carpenter (1995:47-62) claims that there was a steady escalation of rhetoric from individuals of varying political persuasions who emphasized the drug trade as the new, exceedingly dangerous threat to national security. Furthermore, he claims that throughout the early and mid-1980s, various right-wing hawks built elaborate theories of a “narco-terrorist” or “narco-communist” threat to American security. Nevertheless, the official distinction between counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency assistance remained U.S. policy until the spring of 2002. One important impact of the “drugs-as-a-security-threat” image was to gain support for U.S. military intervention in the Western Hemisphere among politicians that were normally opposed to such conduct (Ibid).

Any state identity in world politics is partly the product of the social practices that constitute that identity at home. Hence, politics at home constrain and enable state identity, interests, and actions abroad (Hopf 1998:195). The state’s assumed need to construct a national identity at home to legitimize the state’s extractive authority has effects on state identity abroad (Ibid).

A social constructivist would likely argue that U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is an effort to position the case of Colombia into its current global war on terror. Hence the policymakers’ language, of late, focuses on creating ideas about Colombian groups as international terrorists who are threatening the entire Andean region. In light of a lack of shifts or acceleration in the Colombian conflict, one could argue that these ideas have been manifested, and disseminated to this end. A social constructivist could explain this in terms of the U.S. wanting to strengthen its identity as a democratic society that is trying to help allies in getting rid of insurgency groups. At the same time, Colombian politicians are happy to see Colombia fit into the global war on terror, because it makes the U.S. more interested in cooperating with them. Social constructivism assumes constant dynamism and change. The nature of actors and the international context are neither simple nor pre-ordained. Instead what the

U.S. does, and how the U.S. and the Andean region in general, and Colombia in particular, interact determines the nature of the social context (Ba and Hoffman 2003:21).

Neo-realism and neo-liberalism have problems accounting for the possibility that state identities can change. Social constructivists are interested in not only how actors behave, but also how for instance organizations shape what actors want and who they are (Ibid:24). The U.S. and Colombia may be trading partners because they identify themselves as allies and that this relationship is part of their respective identities, and as pointed out by Ba and Hoffman (Ibid:29): “Even powerful states are shaped by their context”.

According to Sikkink (1993:139), the emergence of human rights policy demonstrates the power of ideas to reshape understandings of national interests. Before 1973, for example, human rights were rarely explicitly considered in the U.S. foreign policy calculus. After 1976, legislation and executive policy led to the explicit inclusion of human rights criteria in foreign policy decision making (Ibid:143). Nevertheless, the U.S. is not considered to have a multilateral human rights policy because it has not ratified the optional protocol to the covenant on Political and Civil Rights and they have not recognized the jurisdiction of the Inter American Court (Ibid:144). Do human rights have an impact on U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia? Although U.S. State Department states that U.S. objectives in Colombia are, among others, to strengthen democracy and human rights, the U.S. has been willing to neglect human rights atrocities in Colombia. The U.S. government is required by law to certify that the Colombian government and military are complying with human rights conditions before U.S. aid is transferred. Nevertheless, Church World Service claims that both Presidents Clinton and Bush routinely waived this requirement. Holsti (1995:303) suggests that in general governments are not as sensitive to condemnation abroad as they are to expressions of opinion at home.

Whereas neo-realists regard human rights policies as insignificant (Sikkink 1993:157), constructivists argue that norms matter (Ba and Hoffman 2003:26). Neo-realists would suggest that human rights policies are adopted to further the economic

and security interests of a country (Sikkink 1993:157). According to social constructivists, norms do not necessarily determine outcomes but they do help define and limit a range of acceptable policy choices, and reformulate understandings of interest (Ba and Hoffman 2003:26).

3.4 The bureaucratic actor model

Realist approaches assume that states have objective, identifiable interests. Constructivists, however, assume that interests are not a priori, and that they can change due to social interaction between actors. The intricacy of U.S. policymaking indicates that we need to use a bureaucratic actor model in analyzing U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia rather than a rational, unitary actor model. I argue that the complexity of U.S. domestic politics is important to emphasize in order to fully understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. In chapter six, I address the bureaucratic actor model.

In chapter seven, I address the fruitfulness of applying the complex actor model to the case: U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. I do that by looking at Underdal's four specific criteria that are useful to evaluate the generating power of a model. These are generality, conclusiveness, validity, and parsimony and will be explained in the same chapter.

3.4.1 The interests, strategies and policy

U.S. interests are many but invariable. I argue that they shift between anti-narcotics, anti-terror, and oil interests. U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is also mainly continuous. The strategies applied to satisfy U.S. interests, however, have shifted. Since the interests and the policy itself are constant (and the Colombian conflict has not changed in any significant matter), I argue that the change in strategies can be understood in a constructivist perspective.

U.S. interests in Colombia

(1) *Anti-narcotics*: To what extent the threats posed by drugs can explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia in the post-Cold War era.

To find an answer to this, I will look at statements made in official documents and answers given by influential individuals.

I argue that in the case of Colombia, drugs as a “destabilizer”, is the main concern of the U.S. not as a health problem. If the U.S. main concern were health problems, one would expect it to focus more on the demand side of the problem as most experts agree that would be a much more efficient strategy. Hence U.S. interests are mainly to protect their strategic interests in oil and natural resources. If my argument is confirmed, that strengthens the realist/geopolitical perspective on international relations.

(2) *Anti-terror*: If the “war on terror” applies to Colombia, and if it has replaced the “war on drugs”.

To find an answer to this I look at the historical development of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia by talking to influential people and read Congressional hearings addressing the terror issue.

Given that the Colombian conflict has not changed dramatically after September 11th, if there has been a significant change in policy following the terrorist attacks that would lend support for the constructivist perspective that Colombia has become part of “terror rhetoric”, despite a lack of real change, simply in order to protect U.S. geopolitical interests.

(3) *Oil interests*: How Colombian oil and Venezuelan oil is of strategic interest to the U.S.

I will find answers to this by looking at to what extent U.S. officials are concerned with the political and economic instability in the Andean region as well as the level of U.S. investment in Colombia. If I find proofs for U.S. strategic interest in

Colombian and Venezuelan oil, the explanatory power of the realist approach to international politics will be strengthened in explaining U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

In trying to find the overall importance of these interests in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, I test the impact of two factors: the impact of the change in world structure due to the end of the Cold War, and the impact of the terrorist attacks on September 11th. To this end, I will address potential changes in U.S. policy priorities by: 1) looking at whether or not money has been reallocated to different projects, 2) if there is less focus on drugs, 3) if more focus has been given to terror, and/or 4) if Colombia is more frequently on U.S. politicians' agenda. If U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is for the most part continuous, that will strengthen the geopolitical/realist perspective of international relations.

3.5 Summary of chapter three

In this chapter, four relevant terms – foreign policy, national interests, security, and intervention – have been defined. These definitions will provide the basis for further analysis in the following chapters. Although, according to the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. objectives in Colombia are to support the country's democratic institutions and democratic values, the U.S. applies traditional realist methods when approaching Colombia's challenges. Three different approaches to analyzing international relations have been presented: neo-realism, neo-liberalism, and social constructivism. These approaches are considered complementary rather than competing, and will serve as an analytical framework when analyzing the extent to which U.S. foreign policy is driven by drugs. My first hypothesis is that *“drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics.”* In testing my hypothesis, I look at how U.S. foreign policymaking has been influenced by: (1) the structure of world policy and (2) September 11th. My second hypothesis is that *“it is crucial to address the*

complexity of U.S. domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.” In testing this hypothesis, I apply the bureaucratic actor model.

4. Drugs as the trope for U.S. presence in Colombia

The U.S. foreign policy has no guiding principles. It is simply running “on the fumes of the Cold War.”³⁷

4.1 Introduction to U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia

According to Cameron (2002:163), few other regions in the world are so dependent upon and enjoy such complex relations with the U.S. as Latin America. The foreign, and often the domestic policies, of every Latin American and Caribbean country are shaped and constrained by its ties with the U.S. - partly because the U.S. is Latin America's leading trade partner and the largest source of investment capital.

The U.S. is particularly concerned about the internal situation in Colombia and the potential spillover effect to the neighboring countries. Former secretary of state, and assistant to the president for national security affairs, Henry Alfred Kissinger, argues that “Colombia is the most menacing foreign policy challenge in Latin America for the U.S.” (Ibid:165). In 2001, the U.S. approved \$1.3 billion in security assistance to Colombia, which was the most (by far) for any country outside the Middle East.

In addition, the U.S. seems to have reasons for being concerned about illegal drugs. Figures from 2001 show that Colombia now supplies some 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. and 75 percent of the heroine consumed on the U.S. East Coast (Serafino 2001:3). The most obvious reason why the U.S. should worry about drugs from Colombia would be that drugs have a negative impact on Americans and the U.S. society. However, the fact that there are more drugs at lower prices than ever before on U.S. street corners (Youngers 2000:1) shows signs that the “war on drugs” has not been effective and opens up the possibility for other motives. Rather

³⁷ Charles A. Kupchan (2002:29)

than worrying about the effect of drugs on U.S. society, the main concern appears to be what the drug business in Colombia does to the Colombian society in terms of making it unstable and hence creating insecure access for U.S. economic interests in Colombia.

How has the U.S. dealt with this conundrum? Is the drug issue recognized as a concern separate from U.S. interests or as an integral part of it? In this chapter I address whether U.S. interests towards Colombia has changed due to (1) change in global power structures after the Cold War and (2) the increasing awareness of terror threats after September 11th.

4.2 The U.S. “War on Drugs” and Colombia

Colombia never seemed to fit into the anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War. In fact, Jan Egeland³⁸ and Angel Rabesa³⁹ argue that U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia had little to do with the Cold War. Nevertheless, the relationship between the U.S. and Colombia has a long history and between 1949 and 1974, Colombia was the second largest recipient of U.S. aid (Tickner 2003a:4). With President Kennedy’s authorization of the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act, counter-insurgency became firmly embedded in U.S. foreign security goals (Stokes 2002a:1) and in 1962, the original U.S. Special Forces team was sent to Colombia to organize Colombian military for counter-insurgency. In short, the use of paramilitaries, mass civilian displacement, counter-terror, physical coercion, and the targeting of civil society were considered necessary components of U.S. sponsored counter-insurgency (Ibid:3).

As early as 1968, despite the fact that drugs were not yet the main issue, President Nixon addressed the issue of illegal drugs and promised to take the executive steps necessary to make U.S. borders more secure against the plague of narcotics (Carpenter 2003:11). In the 1970s, drugs were only one of several concerns

³⁸ Interview with Jan Egeland, Norwegian Red Cross, June 11, 2002

³⁹ Interview with Angel Rabesa, RAND, September 8, 2003

of the U.S. Former state department employee, Phillip McLean⁴⁰ recalls the “three Ds” from the 1970s: democracy, development, and drugs. It was not until later that drugs became a major issue. It was, however, almost twenty years later – in April 1986 – that a crucial step in both escalating and militarizing the international side of the anti drug effort was made, when President Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 221 declaring drug trafficking to be a threat to the security of the U.S. Two years earlier, Reagan’s Secretary of State, George Shultz, had stressed that “drug abuse is not only a top priority for this Administration’s domestic policy; it is a top priority in our foreign policy as well” (Ibid:19). The NSDD 221 also noted: “in addition to (radical leftist) insurgents, some terrorist groups have been linked to drug smuggling primarily to finance their activities” (ibid. 29-33). Hence the link between drugs and terrorist activity was drawn already at that time. The consequence of NSDD 221 was increased involvement of the armed force in the “war on drugs”, and the consequent militarization of U.S. anti-narcotics strategy. Before supply-side actions, such as interdiction, crop fumigation, and eradication, and demand-side policies based upon penalization of the traffic, had been the main strategies. Now, in addition, distribution and consumption of narcotics began to receive greater priority than rehabilitation and education-based strategies (Tickner 2003a:20). After the issuance of NSDD 221, supporters of the drug war redoubled their calls for the military to play an expanded role. It was also during the 1980s that the George Bush senior administration created the Office of National Drug Control Policy (the so-called White House “Drug czar”) (Carpenter 2003: 29-33).

Incentives for the U.S. military to join the war on drugs increased dramatically at the end of the 1980s. According to Carpenter (Ibid:42-44), members of the national security bureaucracy began to see “the drug war” as a useful substitute to the Cold War and in 1989, Bush’s Secretary of Defense, Cheney, stressed the need:

⁴⁰ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Policy, September 4, 2003

To make clear to everyone in the Department that this [the war on drugs] is a high national security mission for us, and therefore it deserves greater allocation of resources in terms of time and energy and perhaps equipment and troops and personnel than has been true in the past (Ibid).

4.3 U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia: escalation but still the same track

There has been an escalation in U.S. engagement in Colombia after the end of the Cold War. First, in 2000, under the Clinton Administration's "Plan Colombia" (P.L 106-246), the 106th Congress approved expanded political, economic, and military assistance to combat drug production and trafficking in Colombia (Sullivan et. al 2003:5), and on July 13, 2000, U.S. support for Plan Colombia was signed into law (P.L 106-246). Colombia received two-thirds of the funds allocated under Plan Colombia. Later, in April 2001, the Bush Administration unveiled an Andean Regional Initiative (ARI)⁴¹ as a successor to Plan Colombia, requesting \$882 million for the program (Perl 2003:15). Of these funds approximately 45 percent were intended for Colombia and the remainder for six regional neighbors of Colombia⁴² affected by drug trafficking and drug-related violence.

Second, there has been an increase in visits by U.S. officials to Colombia. Adam Isacson⁴³ argues that "Every week there was another high-level official, like General Myers and Donald Rumsfeld who visited Colombia". General Hill⁴⁴ has visited Colombia 16 times this year (2003) and is an optimist with regard to Colombia's situation as he thinks Uribe is doing a good job. Miguel Ceballos⁴⁵ adds that previously only medium level officials from the State Department and ambassadors would visit Colombia.

⁴¹ ARI supports Colombia and its neighbors with foreign assistance in their struggle against drug trafficking and drug-financed terrorist groups (Sullivan et. al 2003: CRS-3-5).

⁴² These are Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela

⁴³ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003. He also referred to the speech by Patterson given in May 2003.

⁴⁴ General James T. Hill, U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September 10, 2003

⁴⁵ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, Sep 9, 2003

In addition, there has been a growing concern for the paramilitaries. Isacson⁴⁶ argues that the criminalization of the paramilitaries started before September 11th. He refers to Colin Powell's visit to Bogotá on September 10th, 2001, the day before the terror attacks. He says there had been significant discussion in Congress about the double standard of listing both the FARC and the ELN on the terrorist list, while the paramilitaries were left out. In other words, one of the purposes of the trip seemed to be to make clear that the U.S. from now on was going to treat all these three organizations as terrorist groups. Bell⁴⁷, who was in Colombia at the time of Powell's visit, explains that the big question was expected to be whether or not the paramilitaries (AUC) would be put on the list. She explains that the Department of Justice recommends who should be on or off the list, and the FARC and the ELN have been on it since 1997. She adds that there are certain things that need to be proven in order to put the groups on the list. The paramilitaries have been put on the list because there is evidence that they are not only involved in narco-trafficking but also in terrorism.

According to rhetoric by U.S. politicians, it appears as if Colombia has become a closer ally of the U.S. after the end of the Cold War. Ceballos⁴⁸ argues that Colombia is more important now from a geopolitical perspective. This can be understood from a neo-realist perspective and its emphasis on geopolitical strategy: the U.S. geographical position influences its foreign policy. In fact, it has been argued that the U.S. cannot afford to let neither Colombia, nor the entire Andean region become unstable politically or economically. This is due to the fact that the entire Andean region is an important market for U.S. exports, and an important supplier of U.S. energy needs. In addition, increased instability could lead to increased illegal migration to the U.S. (Sullivan et. al 2003:3-5).

⁴⁶ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

⁴⁷ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, State Department, Sep 10, 2003

⁴⁸ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

Colombia was one of the loyal supporters of the U.S. led War on Iraq and Ceballos⁴⁹ calls Colombia “the most trusted ally of the U.S. in Latin America”. In fact he claims that many in Washington label Colombia “the darling of the U.S”. Although it seems to be in Colombia’s interest to be on “the U.S. team”, Otero⁵⁰ argues that it is also in the U.S. interest to be aligned with Colombia because he believes it will make Colombia take a stronger stand against Chavez, the President of Venezuela. Moreover, he claims that whereas before the U.S. would impose policy on Colombia, there has been a shift to co-responsibility. He refers to Colombian officials participating in “a dual dialogue” with U.S. officials. Garcia-Peña is of a different point of view. He argues that the relationship between Colombia and the U.S. is not symmetric, and that the U.S. controls Colombia. This shows that there are different views regarding the relationship between Colombia and the U.S. – even among Colombians.

4.4 U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia – post September 11th

The State Department’s annual report, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, highlights U.S. concerns about terrorist threats around the world (Sullivan 2003:1), and in the aftermath of September 11th, security issues have become a higher-profile aspect of U.S. relations with Latin America (Sullivan et. al 2003:3-5). According to the report, there is no confirmed, credible linkage between the Al Quada terrorist network and the region, but the U.S. focused on the *potential* links (Sullivan 2003:1). This concern is an example of the new U.S. national security policy that has come to be known as the Bush pre-emptive doctrine. This doctrine signals a radical break from previous national security strategies and fundamentally changes the way the U.S. may act toward the rest of the world. According to the doctrine, U.S. foreign policy rests on three main pillars: a doctrine of unrivaled military supremacy, the concept of

⁴⁹ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

⁵⁰ Interview with Andrés Otero, minister of interior for six months in the Pastrana administration, April 19, 2004

preemptive or preventive war, and a willingness to act unilaterally if multilateral cooperation cannot be achieved (Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2004). This implies that the U.S. is willing to pursue policies that are preemptive in character.

4.4.1 U.S. regional policy towards Latin America

Congressional attention to Latin America in the 108th Congress has focused on counter-narcotics (through the Andean Regional Initiative⁵¹) and counter-terrorism efforts in the Andean region, security cooperation, and trade issues (Sullivan et al. 2003:3-5). Whereas researchers, such as Adam Isacson and Micheal Shifter⁵², have criticized the Bush administration for not paying enough attention to the region, there has been increased regional cooperation *within* Latin America. The countries in the region strongly condemned the terrorist attacks on September 11th, and Washington took action through the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Rio Treaty⁵³ to strengthen hemispheric cooperation against terrorism (Sullivan 2003:5-6). According to Sullivan (Ibid:4), the U.S. has assisted Latin American and Caribbean nations over the years in their struggle against terrorism and insurgent groups indigenous to the region. In recent years, the U.S. has employed various policy tools to combat terrorism in the Latin American and Caribbean region, including sanctions, anti-terrorism assistance, and training, as well as law enforcement, cooperation, and multilateral cooperation through the OAS. Sullivan states that, although terrorism was not the main focus of U.S. policy towards the region in recent years, attention increased in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks on New York and Washington (Ibid).

As opposed to Isacson and Shifter's critique, Sullivan (2003:4) affirms that others maintain that the U.S. *has* in fact kept an active policy toward Latin America.

⁵¹ See footnote 36

⁵² Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003 and Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003.

⁵³ The 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance obligates signatories to the treaty to come to one another's defense in case of outside attack

They point to the momentum for free trade in the region and to the assistance and support provided to Colombia and its neighbors as they combat drug trafficking and terrorist groups in the Andean region. Moreover, they claim that the new focus on security issues worldwide will only solidify U.S. ties to the region through increased bilateral and regional cooperation such as the “Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism.”

4.4.2 Legal change but mainly continuity with new rhetoric

Although U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia started to escalate before September 11th, the terror attacks seem to have had some impact in speeding up this process.

For FY 2003, the Bush Administration requested \$980 million in ARI funding of which 55 percent was for Colombia (Perl 2003:16) and for FY 2004, the Bush Administration requested \$990.7 million for ARI countries in the accounts compromising ARI funding, including military funding for Colombia.⁵⁴ This included some \$731 million requested for the Andean Counter drug initiative, of which \$463 million is for Colombia. It also includes \$133, 5 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), of which \$110 million is for Colombia.

Whereas Shifter⁵⁵, claims that the main effect that the war on terror has had on Colombia is that there is less focus on the country due to the large emphasis on Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Middle East, Rieser⁵⁶ thinks that the war against terrorism has made it easier for this Bush Administration to obtain broader authority from Congress to carry out certain policies in Colombia. As a result, U.S. policy has expanded from focusing principally on drugs to focusing more on combating terrorism.

⁵⁴ For FY2004, the Administration has not as previous years labeled this amount as the “Andean Regional Initiative”.

⁵⁵ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003.

⁵⁶ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

Isacson⁵⁷, however, claims that “the policy has largely been on autopilot”. During his campaign, Bush said he supported Plan Colombia and that there would be continuity.

Despite the fact that U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia has mainly been continuous, one legal change occurred after September 11th. In August 2004, Congress (at the request by the Bush Administration) decided to expand the scope of U.S. assistance to Colombia beyond a counter-narcotics focus to also include counter-terrorism assistance to the government in its military efforts against drug-financed leftist guerrillas and rightist paramilitaries (Sullivan 2003:4). This meant that the security aid that previously had been exclusively used towards counter-narcotics also could be used for broader security goals like protecting the oil pipe line and assistance with anti-kidnapping.⁵⁸ Although the most immediate effect of the change would be to permit the U.S. to expand intelligence sharing with Colombian security forces, the provision would also allow helicopters and other military equipment. This has provided the Colombian security forces, during the past two years, with power to fight any threat to Colombia’s security (Nowels 2003:24).

Despite the fact that it had previously also been a part of President Kennedy’s policy⁵⁹, Sullivan (2003:5) argues that the *legal* change was a major shift in U.S. Andean policy. Many argued that the U.S. objective in Colombia was shifting from one of combating narcotics production and trafficking to a counter-terrorism and insurgency strategy (Nowels 2003:25). Furthermore, critics who emphasize human rights considerations argued that such a role would inevitably involve tolerance of the linkages between the Colombian military and paramilitary groups, which are responsible for gross violations of human rights (Ibid:45). Shifter⁶⁰ argues that this change would have been very difficult without September 11th. He bases his claims on the fact that many of the members of Congress, who otherwise would have voiced

⁵⁷ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

⁵⁸ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

⁵⁹ See 4.2 in this chapter

⁶⁰ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

serious rejection, remained silent because of the climate in the country after September 11th. Plan Colombia, he claims, was a pure counter-narcotics package, which arguably was the only acceptable solution to the conflict in Colombia in the U.S. at that time.

In short, September 11th, made security arrangements politically acceptable and it enabled the U.S. for the first time to leave the narrower drug agenda of the 1990s. Moreover, Shifter argues that, combined with the breakdown of the peace talks in Colombia in February 2002, this set the stage for this shift in policy that took place in August. Hence after September 11, the trope of drugs was no longer needed for the U.S. to broaden its authority within Colombia. Indeed, one might say that the trope shifted from drugs to terror. In fact, the Administration's "2004 Foreign Military Financing for Colombia" is intended to "support counter-terrorism operations and protect key infrastructure such as the oil pipeline" (Sullivan et al. 2003:7).

However, the escalation appears to have started gradually before August 2002, and the approval by the Congress seems to have been a formal procedure to legalize a practice that in effect had been the rule for a while. Although the U.S. funding was strictly for counter-narcotics and related purposes, the Clinton Administration's stated intent was to cut a major source of revenue to the leftist guerrillas battling the government. The guerrillas reportedly earn tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars per year from taxing coca production and distribution (Serafino 2001:1). Garcia-Peña⁶¹ takes the argument even further and calls Plan Colombia "a counter-insurgency plan disguised as a drug war". The U.S. focus is hence on drugs as a fuel for terrorists.

The above implies that the only real shift after September 11th has been in the use of language. In fact, Isacson⁶² claims that there have in fact only been marginal changes with regard to troops, military, and police assistance as well as the money going to non-drug programs. Politically, however, the Bush administration has

⁶¹ Interview with Garcia-Peña, director of Planet Peace Bogotá, April 15, 2004

⁶² Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

considered Uribe someone they are very happy to work with, more so than Pastrana. Uribe arguably also has had an impact on the change in U.S. foreign policy. According to Otero⁶³, who worked for the Colombian government during Pastrana, President Uribe uses much of the same rhetoric as President Bush. Earlier, when only drugs were the problem, Mexico and Chile got more attention from the U.S. than Colombia. Finally, Villamizer⁶⁴ argues that Colombia has become a “showcase” for the U.S. With Colombia, he (Ibid) argues, the U.S. is showing that it is not only going after Muslim terrorist groups and Colombia is a “best-case-scenario where things are good compared to Iraq”.

4.5 Theoretical approaches to explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia

A neo-realist would have difficulties explaining drugs-as-a-security threat as neo-realists insist on military conflict as the defining key to security and states are considered the main actors. According to Cameron (2002:183-184), neo-realism may prove well suited to parts of the world where the U.S. has a traditional security agenda (the Middle East and north-east Asia) but it has less to offer the rest of the world. Hence, based on Cameron’s view, neo-realism may not explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia as Colombia does not pose a military threat to the U.S.

Drugs as a security issue fits better into the neo-liberalist widening of the security agenda as drugs poses a threat to Americans’ health and drug abuse often lead to criminal action. Hence drugs could pose a security threat to the U.S. A social constructivist would arguably recognize the securitization of the drug issue but in addition this person would explain *how* drugs became a security issue. Most likely he or she would look at the use of language and its impact in gaining support for more U.S. military presence in Colombia. At the end of the 1980s the American people showed great concern for the issue of drug use, with almost 40 percent labeling it the

⁶³ Interview with Andrés Otero, minister of interior for six months in the Pastrana administration, April 19, 2004

⁶⁴ Interview with Andres Villamizer in Fundacion de Seguridad y democratica, Bogotá, April 20, 2004.

worst problem facing America (United States Institute for Peace 2000). Today, however, drugs are not a top priority as only five percent of Americans currently call drugs the greatest problem facing America (Ibid). Therefore, one might expect U.S. politicians to focus on other issues such as terror in order to gain support from U.S. voters for the foreign policy towards Colombia.

McLean⁶⁵ argues that the justification for involvement in Colombia today has started to focus more and more on “fighting terrorism.” In his speech at the White House, September 17, 2002⁶⁶, George W. Bush emphasized that, “defending our Nation against its enemies is the first and fundamental commitment of the Federal Government”. Moreover, Isacson⁶⁷ argues that after September 11th everyone, including Donald Rumsfeld, refers to the FARC and the ELN as “narco-terrorists” (Ibid). He says that irrespective of the main perceived threat to U.S. security in Latin-America, the FARC and the ELN have always fit in (before they were called narco-guerrillas). Isacson exemplifies the shift in rhetoric pointing to the front page of the Colombian newspaper “El Tiempo” on September 12th 2001. It showed the World Trade Center burning surrounded by pictures of a town that had been gas-cylinder bombed by the FARC. “The connection was pretty immediate”, Isacson says. Colombia is now seen as a front of the war on terrorism, though not a main front. He thinks that the U.S. is still trying to figure out what the war on terror means in Colombia (Ibid).

The Colombian conflict appears to have become part of U.S. rhetoric, and the insurgency groups that are defined as international terrorists are among U.S.’ enemies. However, Rieser⁶⁸ notes that even if the guerrillas and paramilitary groups (which have been labeled terrorist organizations by the U.S. State Department) commit terrorist acts, *that* does not automatically make them international terrorists. Moreover, Zamudio⁶⁹ argues that, the guerrilla does not wish a global war, but due to

⁶⁵ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 4, 2003

⁶⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nssall.html>

⁶⁷ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

⁶⁸ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide., September 12, 2003

⁶⁹ Interview with Alfredo Zamudio June 11, 2003

military conditions the terror may cross state borders. Rabesa⁷⁰ claims that the FARC, the ELN and the AUC do not appear to operate at an international level except that they take advantage of border regions with Panama, Venezuela and Brazil to bring in supplies. Nevertheless, there have also been indications that FARC units have taken refuge on the Venezuelan side of the border and have returned to Venezuela after operating in Colombia. Still, even if there are some international aspects of the conflict, Aasheim⁷¹ argues that FARC differ from, for instance Al Qaida, as the latter does not have a particular area of operation.

The consensus appears to be that these organizations commit acts of terror but so far these acts have only had national and slightly regional impact and hence to categorize them as *international* terrorist groups may be misleading. Given that these groups now are on this list, the concern is that the list may prevent a dialogue and possibly a solution to the conflict, as Aasheim puts it: “If we cannot speak with the so-called bad guys, the bad guys won’t change” (Ibid). He gets support from Bernal⁷² who believes that it is necessary to have a dialogue although the people are qualified as terrorists.

September 11th legitimized a shift in focus from drugs to terror but the shift may be due to other factors than U.S. policy making. Bell⁷³, for instance, claims that the labels “narco-traffickers” and “narco-terrorists” are just as much a result of international change as a U.S. decision. Hence she blames the international system, which would be in accordance with Waltz image of the role of state leaders as mechanically limited by the international structure when conducting foreign policy. I agree with Leech (2002:62) that is a simplification of the situation, and that those terms are consciously chosen to demonize the illegal groups. Bell also thinks that September 11th created awareness about the financing, criminal, and terrorist factors, and that the narco-terrorist groups are part of a nexus. In any case, both Bell and

⁷⁰ Interview with Angel Rabesa, RAND, September 8, 2003

⁷¹ Interview with Are Aasheim, June 16, 2003

⁷² Lecture by Jaime Bernal, December 5, 2003b

⁷³ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, State Department, September 10, 2003

Woodrow agree that September 11th convinced the U.S. that it could play a different role: meaning that the assistance that was previously pure counter-narcotics now could be used towards counter-insurgency as well.

Although McLean⁷⁴ admits that the government *could* use the fear of terror to defend their policy, he thinks that they actually believe in it. “President Bush says that we have to stop terrorists, and he gets immediate attention. If he had said: “we have to dismantle violent groups, violent Arabs, and violent Moslems’, by that time he would have lost the people’s attention” (Ibid).

Ceballos⁷⁵ emphasizes that the new message the U.S. is sending to Colombia after September 11th is that they are very involved and committed against terrorism within Colombia. Moreover, Colombia is “the best partner the U.S. has in its fight against terrorism” (Ibid). During the Clinton era, the U.S. Administration was very careful with the language when promoting Plan Colombia which may be explained by the so-called Vietnam syndrome. Ceballos thinks the U.S. was afraid that Colombia would be “a new Vietnam”. This is in accordance with Isacson’s argument, namely that the real shift is only rhetorical. Thus, it is my argument that neo-liberalism offers a better explanation than neo-realism for the type of security threat posed by Colombia. However, with the aim of understanding the shift in focus, one must look to constructivism. In order to find support for the latter, I have analyzed a number of Congressional hearings from 1999 to present in order to detect any obvious differences in the wording pre - and post - September 11th, particularly with regard to the usage of the term “terror”.

I found a few examples to illustrate the choice of words and a shift to a focus on terror. In the Senate on June 30, 1999, Mr. Dewine said that, “Colombia is posing a significant threat to our own hemisphere”, and that “Colombia is shaping up to be the Balkan problem of the Americas”. Moreover, he referred to statistics from the State Department, saying that Colombia accounts for 34 percent of all *terrorist acts*

⁷⁴ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic Studies, September 4, 2003

⁷⁵ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombian program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

committed worldwide. He concluded by saying that, “Colombian terrorists continue to target Americans, kidnapping over a dozen U.S. citizens in 1999 so far [...]”

Almost a year later, on June 19th, 2000 during another Senate Hearing, Mr. Durbin referred to the “right wing terrorist groups.

On May 1, 2003, after September 11th, during a hearing in the House of Representatives, Mr. Souder also referred to these terrorist groups while addressing the drug issue. During a hearing in the House of Representatives on March 6, 2002, Mr. Hyde said that Colombia is under siege by three terrorist organizations, namely the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC.

In a Congressional record from the Senate on July 16, 2002, Mr. Thurmond claimed that:

Unchecked terrorism left free to ravage democracies anywhere ultimately affects us all. Simply because the drug business in Colombia will never be tamed without an end to the armies of terror it feeds (Ibid).

In addition, in a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on October 29, 2003, Senator Coleman said that when we think about the war on terrorism, we think about countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries in the Middle East, but he claims that there is also a battle going on in Colombia between an elected government, and what he calls “three narco-terrorist organizations” (The homepage of Center for International Policy).

The only immediate difference that I can see basing it off these few hearings is that there is specific reference to certain terrorist groups after September 11th whereas this does not seem to have been made explicit before September 11th. Is it the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC that have changed or only the external environment? My analysis based on the interviews and official documents leads to the conclusion that September 11th simply justified a formalization of an already established foreign policy. Nevertheless, one can observe an escalation in the shift following September 11th. Terrorism was a concern before September 11th, but the

terrorist attacks made it easier to talk about spending money on defense issues and there was less opposition in Congress. Most important, there was a focus on drugs as a fuel for terror and instability rather than a health/social problem.

4.6 Summary of chapter four

During the Cold War, Colombia was not of major importance to the U.S. until drugs became a key concern in the 1980s. Although Congress, in August 2002, approved to expand the scope of U.S. assistance to Colombia beyond a counter-narcotics focus to also include counter-terrorism, terror had been a concern at least since 1986 when Reagan signed the National Security Decision Directive. Congressional hearings from 1999 to present also demonstrate that the U.S. was concerned about terror in Colombia before September 11th. Plan Colombia was presented as a pure counter-narcotics package, but it has been argued that Plan Colombia was in fact “a counter-insurgency plan disguised as a drug war”. In any case, based on the money going to counter-narcotics programs, and the number of troops, military, and police assistance, there is little real change after September 11th. On the contrary, the change seems to be rather rhetorical than de facto. The Colombian conflict has become part of U.S. rhetoric, and the insurgency groups are defined as international terrorists. After September 11th the trope of drugs was no longer needed for the U.S. to broaden its authority within Colombia. One might say that the trope shifted from drugs to terror.

5. Drugs on the background of geopolitics

*Our nation's interests in the Andean region extend beyond helping to target the source of this drug flow. The struggle between insurgents and the Colombian government has bled into neighboring countries... Particularly troubling is the fact that one of those nations – Venezuela – is our largest petroleum supplier.*⁷⁶

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw that there has been a shift not only in the use of language with regard to terror and the security threat in Colombia, but there has also been an actual change in that, by law, U.S. aid can now be used to combat insurgency.

In this chapter I bring in factors related to the geopolitical position of Colombia. Colombia is strategically located with a coast on both oceans (the Pacific and the Atlantic), and borders Panama (where the Panama Canal is located), and the relatively unstable Venezuela. As the situation in Colombia deteriorates, there is a risk of spill over into Venezuela, which is even a bigger source of oil for the U.S than is Colombia. In addition, and as emphasized by General Hill, “Colombia is the 5th largest trade partner and the 9th largest supplier of oil to the U.S.”⁷⁷

Chomsky (2001) has argued: “U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia has *nothing* to do with drugs”. He claims that the drug war is simply the official explanation of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia and that the real objectives are to make sure that social change does not take place in Colombia and to get rid of the drug abusers in the U.S (Ibid). In addition he claims there is a second effect, namely that of terrifying Americans.

Chomsky supports his argument by referring to the fact that if the U.S. were really concerned about drugs, the country would spend more money on the demand

⁷⁶ Scrowcroft, Brent (National security adviser to President George H.W Bush from 1988 to 1992) and Graham, Bob, (Senator, Democrat) Los Angeles Times (April 26, 2000) referred to in Dunning and Wirspa (2004:19).

⁷⁷ General James T.Hill, U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September 10, 2003

side through prevention and treatment. Moreover, he argues that the U.S. fails to meet their *stated* objectives – which is to reduce drug abuse in the U.S. –, but not their *real* objectives – “get rid of” the unwanted population within the U.S. (basically to imprison them), and to ensure that social change does not transpire in Colombia (Ibid). This explains why, according to Chomsky, the U.S. carries on with its policy and does not change its efforts to reach those stated objectives.

I, however, argue that the issue is too complex to claim that U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia has *nothing* to do with drugs. On the contrary, I argue that drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but one needs to bring in factors relating to the geopolitical position of Colombia, namely the U.S. desire to control its resources, and, related to that, to secure political stability in the Andean region. However, the actual policymaking is too complex for a unitary actor model. Thus, despite the fact that drugs are one of the factors, the U.S., various actors’ interests in economic factors such as oil lead to a sub optimal distribution of the funds expanded on the supply and demand side of the drug trade. Although the Rand Institute has estimated that spending the money on drug treatment programs would be seven times more effective than attacking the supply side (Driver 2001:3) (U.S. consumers of drugs), the U.S. largely neglects this.

The lack of a unitary actor can arguably be one reason why the U.S. continues with the same policy despite the fact that the war against drugs has not been effective.⁷⁸ Moreover, the “irrationality” of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia gets support in Milner’s (1997) rejection of the unitary actor and will be dealt with in more detail in chapter six. This chapter, however, will focus on the second part of Chomsky’s argument, namely that the U.S. government is terrifying American citizens. Drugs will be discussed on the background of geopolitics. My first hypothesis is that, “*drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics*”. This

⁷⁸ According to the State Department’s International Narcotics Drug Control Strategy report, coca cultivation in Colombia increased with 150% between 1996 and 2001 (Tickner and Pardo 2003:69).

hypothesis is based on the argument made by Dunning and Wirspa (2004:9) about the perceived importance to some U.S. lawmakers and successive U.S. administration of “stabilizing” a country located in the oil-rich Andean region.

5.2 Anti-narcotics

U.S. Drug czar⁷⁹ General Mc Caffrey has argued that Colombia and the U.S. share long-term economic, cultural, and political interests but that drugs have to dominate the bilateral agenda in the short-run (Bulmer-Thomas and Dunkerley 1999:159). Serafino (2001:2) confirms that the U.S. longstanding and, so far, (*stated*) dominant interest in Colombia has been to limit the production and shipment of illegal narcotics from Colombia to the U.S. and Serpa⁸⁰, Ceballos⁸¹, Zamudio⁸² also claim that drugs have been proven to be the principle U.S. concern with Colombia. Shifter⁸³ even says that “it is hard to imagine Colombia with major armed actors operating without drugs, and I seriously doubt that the U.S. would be as involved” (Ibid). Nevertheless, the interest in drugs has lately been joined, and some would argue supplanted, by other important U.S. interests and concerns (Serafino 2001:2).

Since the early 1980s the U.S. government has supported a theory that links the guerrillas with narco-trafficking in Latin America. Hence, the term “narco-guerrilla” has been applied. Colombian army generals have also advanced the concept that drug-traffickers and guerrillas are part of the same operation (Salinas 1997:2). According to Salinas (Ibid), this narco-guerrilla thesis was a necessary argument for supporting aid to the Colombian Army when the U.S. Congress wanted nothing to do with counter-insurgency. Nevertheless, although the State Department actually stated in 2000 that “the fight against drugs remains the principal U.S. national interest in Colombia”, the principal fight for the Colombian Army has been against leftist

⁷⁹ The Director of the National Drug Control Policy is officially nicknamed the Drug czar and is the head of the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy (http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Drug_czar)

⁸⁰ Interview with Horacio Uribe Serpa, President of Organization for American States, September 17, 2003

⁸¹ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

⁸² Interview with Alfredo Zamudio, The Norwegian Red Cross June 16, 2003

⁸³ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

guerrillas (Ibid). In fact, until recently the Colombian Army did not even deny that its priority was fighting the guerrillas as opposed to the drug-traffickers. However, in declassified documentation, former U.S. ambassador to Colombia, Myle Frechette, recently admitted that the perception of the FARC as narco-guerrillas “was put together by the Colombian military, who considered it a way to obtain U.S. assistance in the counter-insurgency” (Stokes 2002:2). This narco-guerrilla rhetoric was also repeatedly used by the Clinton administration during the 1990s in order to justify further militarizing the war on drugs (Leech 2002:62).

Salinas claims that the term narco-guerrilla has been coined to merge these two fights against the guerrillas and the drug traffickers respectively (Salinas 1997:3). U.S. present ambassador to Colombia, Wood, confirms this point of view as he argues that Colombia is important to the U.S. because the U.S. has decided to fight “narco-terrorism”. He claims that it is not possible to distinguish between drugs and terror since the guerrilla is dependent upon drug money, and the drug smugglers are dependent upon the support that they get from the guerrilla (Halvorsen 2002). John Waghelstein, a leading U.S. counterinsurgency specialist explained the PR value of the “narco-guerrilla” concept with a “melding in the American public’s mind and in Congress of this connection [leading] to the necessary support to counter the guerrilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere” (Stokes 2002:3).

5.3 Instability and anti-terror

In addition to drugs, the fear of instability and terror constitutes a significant driving force behind U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Instability in Colombia could disrupt the flow of oil, which would be a negative consequence also for the U.S. Sweig⁸⁴ argues that the more “touchy” reason why the U.S. is engaged in Colombia is that American credibility falters if the Colombian democracy could not be saved.

⁸⁴ Interview with Julia Sweig, September 9, 2003

McLean⁸⁵ goes as far as calling the fear of a Colombian “collapse” the main factor driving U.S. policy towards Colombia. The internal problems that Colombia is facing worry many and Woodrow⁸⁶ sees the link between a possible spill-over from Colombia to the rest of the region, which in her eyes could have an impact on the U.S. The Bush administration also emphasizes the potential spill-over of violence from Colombia and the possible rebirth of drug cultivation in some countries and its spread from Colombia to others (Sullivan et. al 2003:6). Ironically, Colombia’s neighbours fear the “spill-over” effects of the actual U.S. backed campaign in the region (Lobe 2001). In other words, the U.S. believes its involvement may prevent a spill-over, while Colombia’s neighbours fear that the U.S. counter-insurgency will spill-over into their country. Pearl⁸⁷ argues that because Colombia is an important country in the hemisphere facing tremendous internal challenges, U.S. concerns for Colombia’s internal situation can be understood as both self-interest and global responsibility. Hence, according to Pearl, U.S., on the one hand, acts based on consequences, which are aligned with the realist tradition, but on the other they are also acting according to what is considered “moral”, which is in hand with constructivism. Of course one may also argue that the U.S. is utilizing moral rhetoric in order to secure economic interests.

The terrorist activity poses a threat to the Colombian democracy and that worries the U.S. (Sullivan 2003:2). General Hill⁸⁸ claims that the FARC, the ELN, and the AUC target elected government officials and civilians with their brutal attacks, with international human rights groups denouncing the massacres, assassinations, political kidnappings, forced displacements, and forced recruitment of minors by all three of them (Ibid). Based on official documents by the Congressional Research Service, U.S. and Colombian government officials draw a direct link between drug trafficking and the operation of these irregular armies of the right and

⁸⁵ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Policy, September 4, 2003

⁸⁶ Interview with Lorianne Woodrow, Senator Coleman’s assistant, September 12, 2003

⁸⁷ Interview with Jonathan Pearl, Sept 12, 2003

⁸⁸ General James T.Hill, , U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September 10, 2003

left, contending that these groups are supported by the narcotics industry (Veillette and Arvelo-Velez 2003:2). U.S. officials have in fact, stressed the need to go after leftist guerrillas said to provide protection for drug-traffickers. Rarely mentioned, however, is the fact that the guerrillas are also attacking U.S. oil interests in Colombia, especially pipelines. The pipeline from the Caño Limon field, operated by U.S. based Occidental Petroleum Co. and Royal Dutch/Shell, was bombed 79 times in 1999 (Klare 2000). Hence, the U.S. tries to combat these irregular armies so that the country can become more stable and business conditions better.

There seems to be an overall consensus among researchers that drugs and instability are important in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. However, there are differences in the emphasis these researchers placed on these factors. I argue that in order to fully understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, one must go beyond the stated factors: drugs, terror, and instability. In particular, experience in the Middle East has demonstrated the importance economic interests play in U.S. foreign policy. Hence, I now turn to U.S. geopolitical interests.

5.4 U.S. geopolitical interests

Latin America is of great geopolitical interest for the U.S. According to the 1998/1999 annual report of the World Geopolitics of drugs (2000:142), American military bases were forced to redeploy from the Panama Canal, in 1999, because it was given back to the national authorities. Until then, the U.S. had hoped to maintain a military presence in the Panama Canal area in order to preserve geo-strategic interests and was using the spill-over argument when trying to sell the idea of a Multilateral Antidrug Center based in Panama (Ibid:146).

Colombia fluctuates between the fifth and the tenth largest foreign oil supplier to the U.S. In fact, 35 percent of Colombia's export revenues in 2000, were from exports to the U.S. (Dunning and Wirspa 2004:10). Stan Goff, a former U.S. Special Forces intelligence sergeant who retired in 1996 from the unit that trains Colombian anti-narcotics battalions, said to the Bogotá Daily El Espectador in October 2000 that

“the main interest of the United States is oil” (Ibid:1), and that the words coca or narco-trafficker were never mentioned in the training.

Similarly, Senator Paul Coverdell said to the Washington Post in 2000 that “the destabilization of Colombia directly affects bordering Venezuela, now generally regarded as our largest oil supplier” (Ibid:19). Consequently it seems as if oil and other natural resources have once again acquired in the military and security doctrine of the advanced industrialized countries, particularly the U.S.:

In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the military protection of vital sea lanes and resource-rich areas overseas regained a pre-eminence it had in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a governing principle underlying U.S. military deployments (Ibid:5).

Colombia’s oil has steadily become more important to the country’s economy over the past twenty years and all of Colombia’s armed groups, including the military and external actors, have labored to establish control over oil installations, pipelines, and economic spoils of production through for instance threatening the functioning of the industry. Hence oil revenues provide a credible mechanism linking petroleum exploitation to the persistence of conflict. U.S. state officials and private sector representatives argue that attacks on energy infrastructure in Colombia, and implications of Colombian instability for the broader energy rich Andean region, pose a threat to a key source of U.S. oil supplies (Ibid:6-7). Their argument is arguably based on the extended security perspective and the belief that there are more threats to a country than simply the traditional military threat. As referred to in chapter 3, economic security is part of the extended security perspective.

Not only do the attacks pose a threat to a key source of oil supplies, but the attacks on Colombian energy installations have also provided U.S. lawmakers and members of the executive branch with legitimate argument for increasing military aid to Colombia. Moreover, the attacks have legitimized the U.S. mission in Colombia to include counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism (Dunning and Wirspa 2004). The

U.S. is concerned that if armed rebel groups got state power that would foil the U.S. economic plans for increased free trade, oil access, canal building, and possibly cause turmoil in the region (Aby 2004:2).

The way the U.S. interprets the drug problem also has a direct impact on Colombia. Tickner (2003a:83) argues that because the U.S. interprets Colombia's illicit drug production as a domestic security issue and uses coercive diplomatic measures designed to effectively confront this threat, the Colombian state has been forced to "securitize" its own counter-narcotics strategy. An illustrating example is the announcement of the Bush administration in 2002 of its first attempt to train a Colombian army brigade to protect the strategic Coveñas oil pipeline – which is partly owned and operated by the U.S. multinational, Occidental Petroleum (Dunning and Wirspa 2004:7-8). It seems like Colombia's willingness to fight the insurgency pays off. As a matter of fact, in 2003, the U.S. Trade Representative, Zoellick⁸⁹ said that the U.S. is open to sign an agreement with Colombia because they are acknowledging that Colombia is fighting terrorism⁹⁰ and that its democracy is under pressure.

Petras (2001:32) argues that U.S. military involvement in Colombia is geopolitical and that strategists in Washington are concerned with several geopolitical issues that could adversely affect U.S. power in the region and beyond. He claims that there is both a growing discontent to U.S. hegemony in the region and an opposition to the market ideology. Oil production, supply, and prices are also linked to the challenge in the region (Ibid). Venezuela is a major U.S. supplier; Colombia is a oil producing state and has substantial untapped reserves, as is the case on a lesser scale for Ecuador (Ibid:34). Aby (2004:2) argues that the intent of the U.S. military aid to Colombia is to subdue the social movements' resistance to free trade, privatization of oil industries and social services. Petras (2001:36) claims that as long as Latin American regimes and their opposition continue to believe that there is no alternative to U.S. hegemony they will conform to the major demands emanating from

⁸⁹ Robert Zoellick,, Conference in Washington D.C. September 10, 2003

⁹⁰ Colombia was one of the U.S. key supporters in the War on Iraq.

Washington and its representatives in the international financial institutions. Stokes (2002a:3) argues in a similar way as Petras. He claims that despite a rhetorical shift in U.S. policy from anti-communism to a war on drugs and now a war on terror after the Cold War, and later September 11th, U.S. objectives have essentially remained the same. According to Stokes (Ibid), these objectives are to prevent a workable hemispheric alternative that may challenge U.S. hegemony. In fact, the U.S. Southern Command has even identified “radical populism” as the new emerging security threat in Latin America and as a threat to U.S. national security (Barry 2004:1-2). In general, the anti-Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) movement in Latin America has been able to mobilize a large group of people. In Bolivia, for example, the anti-U.S. sentiment is strong, especially among the indigenous population. Many strongly oppose the FTAA initiated by the U.S., as they argue that the agreement does not in fact truly enable free trade. Despite this, the number of people that belong to the “extreme radicals” is limited and I find it difficult to believe that this movement poses as an emerging security threat to the U.S.

Colombia and the U.S. have strong historical relations but from a U.S. perspective the focus is rather to underline the benefits for Colombia to cooperate with the U.S. Bell⁹¹ emphasizes that economic progress in Colombia is not only good for trade, but also good for fighting drugs and terror. It seems clear that the U.S. has economic interests in Colombia through commerce such as oil and American companies. The head of U.S. Southern Command, General Hill⁹², explicitly says that, “the U.S. has multiple competing needs and that we should not forget that the U.S. has business in Colombia”.

There is no question that the U.S. has an interest in securing its oil interest in Colombia, as argued by Valencia⁹³. Some, such as Rojas⁹⁴, even claim that the U.S. is using the Colombian conflict to control the Andean region and its natural resources.

⁹¹ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, State Department, September 10, 2003

⁹² General James T.Hill, U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September. 10, 2003

⁹³ Interview with Leon Valencia, former ELN guerrilla member, April 19, 2004.

⁹⁴ Interview with Rojas Rodriguez, Consultant in Human Rights and displacement, April 20, 2004.

Because of its strong geopolitical interests, it is often difficult to trust the U.S. claim that human rights and democracy are important objectives in their Colombia policy. One of president Uribe's human rights advisors, Lara⁹⁵, claims that the U.S. is not interested in securing human rights in Colombia, and that oil, Venezuela and drugs are the only real objectives of the super power. Villamizer⁹⁶ refers to petroleum as the main U.S. interest next to Venezuela and control over the Andean region. Woodrow⁹⁷ confirms that the U.S. is very concerned about Venezuela, and what she calls "Chavez undemocratic behavior." Hence these respondents argue that having Colombia as an ally give the U.S. leverage in Venezuela.

The fact is that the U.S. imports more oil from Colombia and its neighbors Venezuela and Ecuador than from all Persian Gulf countries combined, and, in June 2000, Colombia announced its largest oil discovery since the 1980s (Dunning and Wirspa 2001:1). U.S. firms have allies in the U.S. national security apparatus and in 1998, Gen. Charles Wilhelm, then head of the U.S. Southern Command, told Congress that oil discoveries had increased Colombia's "strategic importance", and in April 2000, Senator Bob Graham (D-Florida) and former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft warned in a Los Angeles Times editorial that Colombia's reserves would "remain untapped unless stability is restored" (Ibid:1-2).

As we have seen, though economics is not a stated objective, my analysis demonstrates the important role it plays in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. In addition, anti-narcotics and anti-terror both play an integral role in the complete picture of factors driving U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Nevertheless, economic interests also must be taken into account. In fact, the stated objectives may very well be a cover for the real interest: Oil. The reality is that the oil is found in the midst of a conflict area and it is difficult to maintain qualified workers there because of how dangerous the job has become (Gorman 2001). Colombia remains an important economic as well as political partner to the U.S. and vice versa. There is a

⁹⁵ Interview with Alberto Lara, Human Rights Lawyer, advisor for President Uribe, April 20, 2004

⁹⁶ Interview with Andres Villamizer, April 20, 2004

⁹⁷ Interview with Lorianne Woodrow, legislative assistant to Senator Coleman September 12, 2003

constant relationship between these two sovereign states of which neither appears willing to let go. General Hill summarizes the U.S. side of the relationship:

The future of Colombia is strategically, economically, and culturally important to the U.S., and the U.S. must not waiver in their commitment to them now. Good neighbors stand by each other.⁹⁸

Similarly, former Colombian ambassador to the U.S., Gabriel Silva, commented on the Colombian side of it in 2002 in the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*:

Colombia appears as a new strategic priority [to the U.S.]. The geopolitical re-evaluation of our country is something we should not misuse (Dunning and Wirspa 2004: 20).

Based on the comment by the former Colombian ambassador, it appears as if Colombia has an interest in U.S. involvement in Colombian domestic affairs. Rather than talking about U.S. intervention or U.S. post imperialism, which are often used to describe U.S. involvement in Latin America, the former ambassador emphasizes the importance of “geopolitical re-evaluation of Colombia by the U.S.”

5.5 The geopolitics of Colombia: the U.S. vs. the EU/Europe⁹⁹

In order to understand the impact of geopolitics on U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, a comparison between the U.S. and Europe with regard to Colombia seems relevant, as the U.S. and Europe have different points of departure based on geographic locations. Whereas Colombia appears to be of geopolitical interest to the U.S., the country is geographically far removed from Europe. Based on the theory of

⁹⁸ General James T.Hill, U.S. Southern Command, lecture, September. 10, 2003

⁹⁹ Some of the respondents referred to the EU, while others referred to Europe in general. For simplicity, I make no distinction in my analysis.

geopolitics, one would therefore expect the European Union (EU) to be less involved in Colombia. However, Europe may have other interests such as those based in liberalism: Securing democracy and human rights.

One argument made by Aasheim,¹⁰⁰ is that Europeans see Colombia's situation as one that will not affect them directly, whereas the entire Andean region is in the U.S. "neighborhood" and hence has an impact the U.S. McLean¹⁰¹ thinks that Europeans in general underestimate Latin America's importance because of the distance between the two continents. One can draw a parallel from McLean's comment to U.S. involvement in Israel: despite the geographical distance between the two countries, the U.S. remains engaged in Israel. Both Aasheim and McLean explain the importance of Colombia in geopolitical terms and the non-importance of it to Europe due to lack of geopolitical interests and so does Ceballos¹⁰² as well. He argues:

We know that Colombia is not a priority for Europe. You have Africa, your internal problems with immigrants and Colombia is far away (Ibid).

Moreover, Ceballos adds that the U.S. can ask Europe for help, but they have to take into account that Colombia is not going to be a great priority for them in the future. He says that a healthy approach could be to ask how the U.S. and Europe could share information and approaches as a joint effort to help Colombia. There was a meeting in Georgetown a year ago where 15 EU representatives and American officials met and talked about creating bridges between the U.S. and the EU. In fact, the U.S. and the EU are actually cooperating in many Colombian districts; they work together on strengthening economic development and the issue of internally displaced persons. Ceballos argument is therefore that the EU is actually somewhat involved. There are,

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Arne Aasheim, special advisor/ambassador, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 16, 2004

¹⁰¹ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Policy, September 4, 2003

¹⁰² Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

however, great differences between the EU and the U.S. view on Colombia in that the two have very different opinions on how to deal with the drug issue.

Whereas Isacson dislikes the division between the U.S. as contributor of “hard aid” and Europe as a contributor of “soft aid”, Sweig¹⁰³ seems to support the idea of European soft aid and U.S. hard aid with her statement “we do the guns, and Europe does the butter. Europe is allergic to the guns, and we don’t care so much about the butter”. According to her, “Plan Colombia was sold with no effort to consult with Europe which was used by Europeans as sort of a scape goat”. Moreover she argues that Europe claims that the U.S. did not consult them, and therefore Europe responds by saying, “we don’t have to play in the sand box, but in fact they wouldn’t have wanted to play in the sand box”. Seen from this perspective, the U.S. “let Europe off the hook”, by not consulting them.

Others think that to compare the use of soft and hard aid based on the amount of dollars spent is misleading. McLean defends the U.S. against the criticism from Europe with regard to the U.S. spending more in military aid than social aid by saying:

We have to remember that things like helicopters are very expensive. It costs \$12 million for a single helicopter, and that is a lot of money if you buy ten helicopters. It also costs to train them to drive these helicopters. To buy books for professor can be much less expensive.¹⁰⁴

The question is whether McLean makes a legitimate comparison between helicopters and books, since the U.S. traditionally often gives its poorer allies military equipment which is old and no longer useful to the U.S. anymore. McLean is among those who claim that Europe “has promised” money to Colombia. In addition he thinks that Europe, in particular Southern Europe, could be helpful on justice system, mainly

¹⁰³ Interview with Julia Sweig, Council on Foreign Relations, September 9, 2003

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 4, 2003

because their justice system is more similar to the Colombian system than that of the U.S. (Ibid).

Europeans in general tend to criticize the U.S. for its engagement in Colombia. At the same time, Europeans do not tend to come with an alternative solution to the problem. Their way of defending themselves is to criticizing the U.S. for not having been consulted before plans were completed and only been asked to contribute money after the plans were finalized. Like McLean, Bell¹⁰⁵ accuses the EU for not following through on its promises. She claims that Europeans are also principal consumers of drugs and therefore they are contributing in feeding terrorism. Similarly, Rieser¹⁰⁶ stresses that Europeans have pledged a lot of aid but far less has actually been provided. His impression is that, “the Europeans did make pledges much of which they didn’t deliver and that this is not the first time.” However, he does not think the Europeans have any obligation to do something.

In order to improve the dissatisfaction with one another, it seems necessary for the U.S. and Europe to have an open dialogue about the Colombian conflict. Shifter¹⁰⁷ suggests building a bridge between the U.S. and European approach. On the one hand, the U.S. has to move away from a narrow drug or terrorist question to a more institutional one. On the other hand, some Europeans need to learn that military support and security support is crucial for Colombia. In order to win respect from the Colombian illegal armed groups some military power is needed.

Serpa¹⁰⁸ claims that the Europeans and the Americans approach the problem differ due to the need to confront the security threat posed by Colombia with arms. Hence Serpa is securitizing U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. He blames Europeans for not practicing what they preach, for they also share responsibility.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, U.S. Department of State, September 9, 2003

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Horacio Uribe Serpa, Colombian ambassador to the Organization of American States, September 17, 2003

5.6 The linkage between the various interests

The U.S. is the world's largest energy consumer and from 1990 through 2003, natural gas consumption in the U.S. increased by about 14 percent (Homepage of the Country Analysis Brief). At the same time, the U.S. is also the world's largest energy producer (Ibid), but the country consumes more than twice as much as it produces and hence it is dependent upon oil imports to fulfill its needs.

According to Z magazine's homepage, Venezuela is number eight on the list of countries that produce oil and it is number six among the countries with the most oil reserves.¹⁰⁹ It is also the U.S largest petroleum supplier (Dunning and Wirspa 2004:19). Colombia has had an internal conflict for more than four decades and this conflict has the potential to spread to neighboring countries, in particular, Venezuela. This worries the U.S. as a spread of the conflict to Venezuela could hinder the flow of Venezuelan oil into the U.S. Because of this fear of losing oil access, the U.S. is expanding a great deal of effort to avoid a spill-over of the conflict.

The internal conflict played out by different groups is also fueled by the drug industry. Both the guerrilla and the paramilitaries, and some even claim the government, gain economically from the drug industry and that way they have a steady income to finance the war. Since drugs fuel instability, the U.S. has an interest in attacking also the drug industry as it directly impacts U.S. access to oil.

Finally, the illegal Colombian groups use what the U.S. labels "terrorist" methods to show their dissatisfaction with the U.S. Both the FARC and the ELN oppose foreign involvement in the nation's oil industry. According to the Christian Science Monitor, these illegal groups have therefore bombed oil pipelines in hope that it will weaken the government by depriving it of foreign earnings.

In sum, drugs and terror influence U.S. geopolitical interests in Colombia and Venezuela. However, I argue that stated objectives alone – strengthening human rights and democracy, and domestic drug issues – fail to offer a sufficient or coherent explanation for demonstrated U.S. policy priorities.

¹⁰⁹ www.scaruffi.com/politics/oil.html

5.7 Securitizing drugs and terror

According to the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, the U.S. has:

Developed an active strategy to help the Andean nations adjust their economies, enforce their laws, defeat terrorist organizations, and cut off the supply of drugs (Ibid).

Moreover the document quotes that the U.S. is:

Working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and the right [...] (Ibid).

The Bush Administration has argued that the U.S. faces not only a threat from drug production and trafficking in the Andean region, but also from the increasing instability fueled by the drug trade. They claim that the assistance to Colombia is needed to help a democratic government besieged by drug-supported leftist and rightist armed groups. Terrif et al. (1999:154) claim that the U.S. has officially identified the international trade in narcotics as a security threat not only because of its concerns about the impact of drugs in the country, but also because of its economic and security interests in Central and South America. Chomsky (2001) criticizes the securitization and argues that:

The drug war is perfect because with it, Americans are willing to accept authority and power, and it provides the cover of the policy carried out abroad for years under another pretext. The main lobbyists are the military industry and the oil corporations. They want U.S. taxpayers to buy military helicopters, chemical weapons, and biological weapons and send arms (Ibid).

After September 11th, critics have stated that as long as something can be related to terror, few people have dared to question U.S. policy. This general statement may also be true for U.S. policy towards Colombia. In his book, *Beyond Fear. Thinking clearly about security in an Uncertain World*, Bruce Schneier asserts that:

The war on terror is not a war in a normal sense of the word: one nation-state fighting another. The war on terror is a war against an idea, a tactic. It's a rhetorical war, and the phrase is more marketing than anything else (2003:231).

The chance of a person being struck by lightening is many times higher than the chance of a person dying of anthrax (Ibid:275). Thus it may seem strange that the few cases of anthrax terror occurring in the U.S. a couple of years ago got so much attention. The heavy focus on anthrax may have been part of a strategy intended to make people scared due to the fact that in situations where people are living in fear, it is easy to tolerate that others make security decisions for you, and people may passively accept any security offered to them (Ibid:8). This brings us to Schneier's main argument that, "most people are comforted by action, whether good or bad" (Ibid:38). Nevertheless, security is often invisible when it is working, and hence it may be taken for granted and only when things go wrong does one realize the weakness or lack of a security system. Therefore it is impossible to calculate the risk of a repeated September 11th (Ibid:6). Consequently, as long as there is a certain risk to national security and people fear for themselves, the politicians can "take advantage" of people's fear and use it to their benefit. Hence, as long as people do not overcome that fear and they trust the people governing, they are willing to lose some liberty if that means that they may end up being safer. Moreover, people often tend to lose their critical thinking and reality-testing when they are in a group "unless there are clear-cut disagreements among the members" as argued by Vocke (1976:84). "If our leader and everyone else in our group decide that it is okay, the plan is bound to succeed" (Ibid).

Thus we see that language is being used to scare people and create a belief in a certain policy. This can be understood on the background of a constructivist approach. This gets support in Tickner's (2003a:78) statement that "drugs and, more important, terrorism occupy a crucial discursive function in support of American identities and values". Sweig¹¹⁰ emphasizes that the FARC's military victories against the Colombian armed forces in 1998 was a big wake up call as people started to fear that the Colombian state would not be able to withstand the FARC.

By uttering "security", a state representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it (Wæver 1995:213). In such cases, drugs are portrayed as an external threat (as supported by the liberalist approach to security threats) to the social fabric of the state and their importation is viewed in analogous terms as an invasion, a violation of sovereignty. The solution has been said to be interdiction and military action. The problem is also that the focus then is purely on external factors rather than a domestic issue. Dealing only with the supply side does not solve the problem as nothing is done to reduce the demand for drugs (Dalby 1997:4-15). This was proven when efforts to destroy the supply of drugs from Bolivia and Peru only ended up with the drug production moving to Colombia. The U.S declared a "war on drugs", a critical element of which has included going after drugs where they are produced or seizing them before they reach U.S. territory (Terrif et. al 1999:154). Shifter¹¹¹ says that he believes that there is a difference in the degree to which the U.S. decisions makers are really concerned about violence and the degree to which they use it as an excuse for their engagement. This observation is arguably in accordance with a realist perspective: Politicians will claim values, but act on self interests (Matlary 2002).

One may argue that some politicians have consciously used the fear element connected to the U.S. war on drugs, and lately its war on terror, to gain support for their policy. At the same time, the U.S. does in fact have information that the FARC

¹¹⁰ Interview with Julia Sweig, Council of Foreign Relations September. 9, 2003

¹¹¹ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, Sep 4, 2003

was responsible for the kidnappings of three American missionaries from the New Tribes Mission on January 31, 1993. The FARC has admitted that on March 4, 1999, one of its members killed three American environmental and indigenous rights workers who had been visiting the U'wa indigenous group in Colombia (Serafino 2001:8). Sweig¹¹² argues that if American Ambassadors, or American targets in Colombia are targeted the “bad guys” she will call them a threat to the U.S. Sweig’s use of “bad guys” would from a constructivist perspective demonstrate a demonization of the enemy to reproduce a given representation of U.S. identity. As mentioned earlier, by distinguishing between oneself and the enemy, it is easier to know whom to hate. Sweig also sees the potential of a Colombian collapse as a threat to the region and therefore to the U.S. (Ibid).

Others focus on the criminal element that surrounds the drugs industry and understand security as an extension of the traditional security term, as opposed to security in the realist sense. Bell¹¹³ for instance considers Colombia a direct security threat to the U.S. because of the criminal element of the drug industry. She also mentions public health, which in her eyes is part of security. Hence, whether Colombia is a direct security threat to the U.S. or not depends on how we define security threat. Rieser¹¹⁴ argues that if being the largest source of cocaine is a security threat, then Colombia is a security threat to the U.S. Egeland¹¹⁵ views Colombia purely as a threat to the U.S. with regard to the narco-trafficking, and does not believe that the conflict has a large spill-over potential. Rabesa argues that,

The situation in Colombia is a threat to the U.S. to the extent that activities of these illegal groups allow the continuation of the drug production and distribution. They are also a threat in the sense that their activities destabilize the Colombian government. From this it follows that the destabilization of a government of a country that is strategically important right next to the Panama

¹¹² Interview with Julia Sweig, Council of Foreign Relations September. 9, 2003

¹¹³ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, State Department, September 10, 2003

¹¹⁴ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

¹¹⁵ Interview with Jan Egeland, Norwegian Red Cross, June 11, 2003

Canal and bordering both the Atlantic and the Pacific coast is of concern to the U.S. from a variety of perspectives.¹¹⁶

Rabesa's statement, which is referring to Colombia as a strategic interest to the U.S., can be understood from a realist perspective.

Although certain researchers see the Colombian conflict as a threat to some U.S. objectives, people like Shifter¹¹⁷, Isacson¹¹⁸, Zamudio¹¹⁹, and Serpa¹²⁰ do not see Colombia as a direct security threat to the U.S. The latter stresses that Colombia is a democratic country and that peaceful people live there. He admits that Colombia produces drugs, but he emphasizes that Colombia itself is a victim of the violence of narco-trafficking. Moreover, he underlines that Colombia is helping the U.S. in their fight against drug production.

Ceballos¹²¹ and Shifter¹²² underline that they do not perceive the ELN, the FARC, and the AUC as a real threat to the U.S. and while Ceballos underlines that these groups are not international terror groups, Shifter admits that they could destabilize the broader region and if instability spreads, then in the future it could become a more serious security threat to the U.S.

5.8 Summary of chapter five

Not surprisingly, people perceive the potential security threat from Colombia differently. I argued for the possibility of viewing Colombia as a security threat to the U.S. in a broader sense of the term if 1) these illegal groups continue their drug production and distribution and as a consequence of their business threaten to destabilize Colombia and hence U.S. interests or U.S. workers in Colombia are at risk or 2) Colombian drugs indirectly threatens U.S. society due to the negative health and

¹¹⁶ Interview with Angel Rabesa, RAND, September 8, 2003

¹¹⁷ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

¹¹⁸ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Alfredo Zamudio, June 11, 2003

¹²⁰ Interview with Horacio Uribe Serpa, September 17, 2003

¹²¹ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

¹²² Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

social problems caused by drugs. This is aligned with a liberalist view of a wider understanding of security. However, Colombia is not a security threat to the U.S. in the realist sense of security.

Partly because of its location, the U.S. is affected by Colombian *drugs* that get access to the U.S. black market. Drugs are therefore a U.S. domestic concern but they are also a concern because they fuel terror within Colombia which then becomes a destabilizing factor that could lead to a collapse in democracy that could spread throughout the region and also affect U.S. interests. Hence, and again, Colombia could potentially pose a security threat to the U.S. in a broader sense of the security term. In addition, economic interests are important for two reasons. First, trade and oil could be stabilizing factors for Colombia because economic progress is good for fighting drugs and terror. Second, the U.S. benefits from a good relation with Colombia because it helps secure U.S. economic interests in Colombia and having Colombia as an ally may give the U.S. leverage in Venezuela. Hence, the hypothesis that “*drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics*” has been strengthened.

6. The complexity of U.S. domestic politics

*The gravest domestic threat facing our nation today is drugs.*¹²³

6.1 Introduction

Milner (1997:27) argues that domestic politics and international relations are inextricably interrelated. U.S. international position exerts an important impact on its internal politics and economics. Similarly, its domestic situation shapes its behavior in foreign relations (Ibid). Hence, in order to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia it is not sufficient to only look at drugs on the background of geopolitics. U.S. domestic politics also play an important role.

U.S. has multiple interests in Colombia and because “the U.S.” is such a complex actor consisting of different priorities, the actual policymaking is too complex for a unitary actor model. While the defense department may have an interest in securing employment and therefore emphasizing the terror threat and the need to build more arms, the State Department may have an interest in promoting human rights. When all the various interests come together, the foreign policy output is not necessarily rational and the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia appears confusing and complex.

As argued in the beginning of the previous chapter, “the U.S.” cannot be regarded as a unitary actor because different groups pull in different directions leading to “collective irrationality” in U.S. foreign policy making. Instead, U.S. foreign policy needs to be understood on the background of the bureaucratic actor model. Hence, my second hypothesis, which will be addressed in this chapter, is that *“it is crucial to address the complexity of U.S. domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.”*

¹²³ George Bush senior in the address to the Nation on the National Drug Control strategy, September 5 1989, referred to by Tate (1999) and available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/papers/1989/89090502.html>

The U.S. is a country facing tremendous internal problems such as social inequalities. According to Nilsen (2004:6) the U.S. population can be divided in two categories: the rich people and the poor people. Because of all the internal differences, the U.S. has been portrayed as “a divided America.” In order to avoid this division, the democrats represented by state Senator Barack Obama, argued recently that there is not a divided America, only a united America.¹²⁴ From a constructivist perspective this can be understood as a rhetoric effort to unite a heterogeneous people. And during the process of defining oneself, the need to define others occurs. Hence the creation of an enemy may develop.

6.1.1 American identity and the American “exceptionalism”

As opposed to most states that are founded based on ethnicity, geography, language, culture, and religious belonging, the U.S. is founded on political ideals, such as democracy, market economy, personal freedom, and rights (Melby 1996:3). Hence anyone that wanted could become American as long as the person accepted the ideological foundation. This has led to a strong ideological tradition in American politics (Ibid). As part of this ideological tradition is the so-called “American exceptionalism” which is based on the belief that the U.S. represents something special (exceptional) and hence carries a responsibility in world politics (Ibid). El-Din Aysha (2003:114) refers to the American collective “we” as premised on a set of political values set out in the Declaration of Independence. He claims that Huntington in his *Clash of Civilizations*, written in 1993,

Intends to solve the myriad of problems raised by multiculturalism, anti-federalism, commercialism, and America’s identity crisis by finding enemies for America all over the world (Ibid:123).

¹²⁴ <http://www.dems2004.org/>

When the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union crumbled a decade ago, many had hoped the U.S. would be able to dramatically cut its military budget and invest in a peace dividend that could address domestic need (Speeter 2001:1). However, El-Din Aysha (2003:114) points out that instead, the end of the Cold War and the demise of communism opened up a gap in American foreign policy circles, creating an intellectual vacuum after containment could no longer serve as America's strategic doctrine. Hence the Pentagon found new enemies with which to justify continued Cold War-level spending (Speeter 2001:1). One can argue that two of these enemies were the Colombian guerrillas and Colombian paramilitaries. According to Youngers (2000:1), the Drug War is essentially the Cold War of the 1990s. He argues that the U.S. has adopted the same mentality and approach to a new problem. The quote above by George Bush senior in his address to the nation on the national drug control strategy on September 5, 1989 illustrates that drugs was regarded as the greatest threat to the U.S. In his speech he referred to Colombia and how the U.S. has "responsibility not to leave our brave friends in Colombia to fight alone."¹²⁵ Again, this is showing that in order to unite Americans and to keep the "American identity", politicians focus on how special the U.S. is at the same time as they separate the external world into one group of "enemies" and another of "allies."

6.2 The weakness of the unitary actor model

At the same time as more U.S. officials are now visiting Colombia, Isacson¹²⁶ argues that U.S. policy is ambiguous because in some parts of the State Department and the Pentagon, politicians are talking about handing over more responsibilities to the Colombians and starting to reduce the U.S. commitments by the end of FY 2005. He is therefore confused on whether the U.S. is reducing or increasing its efforts towards Colombia. What Isacson is observing is not very peculiar considering the fact that there are many different interests pulling in different directions among the policy

¹²⁵ <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/papers/1989/89090502.html>

¹²⁶ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

makers. Hence some U.S. politicians are voting for less engagement in Colombia and others are voting for more. There are arguably different interests between the various U.S. departments, as well as ambivalence within the departments. One example of the latter is illustrated by Carpenter (2003:43). In June 1988, the Secretary of Defense, Frank Carlucci, stated that the primary role of the Defense Department was to protect and defend the U.S. from armed aggression. Nevertheless, with the end of the Cold War and the Soviet enemy, the Pentagon saw the war on drugs as a plausible alternative mission (Ibid:44). Sweig¹²⁷ argues that since September 11th, both the drug constituency and the drug policy caucus in Congress and what is now the counter terror constituency, think that the U.S. should be in Colombia and they are battling over resources.

In addition to the various departments, bureaucrats may also have an influence on parts of U.S. foreign policy. According to Holsti (1995:267), the American State Department receives about 2,300 cables daily from American diplomatic and consular officials abroad. Since the Secretary of State will only read about two percent of these, the experts (bureaucrats) make decisions based on their own values, needs and traditions in matters that are not vital.

At the same time, while there is unlikely to be a unified view of the “national interest” and of the effect of cooperation upon it, the political leaders also need to consider the conflicting interests among different pressure groups, but also the electoral consequences of each choice (Milner 1997:16). McLean¹²⁸ and Serpa¹²⁹ both emphasize the important role of U.S. Congress in influencing U.S. policy towards Colombia. The first estimates that 40 percent of Congress has traveled to Colombia. In addition to Congress, Bell¹³⁰ *also* mentions President Bush, the Colombian Embassy, General McCaffrey and Undersecretary of State Pickering as well as human rights groups as being influential in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. According

¹²⁷ Interview with Julia Sweig, September 9, 2003

¹²⁸ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 4, 2003

¹²⁹ Interview with Horacio Uribe Serpa, organization of American States, September 17, 2003

¹³⁰ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, U.S. Department of State, September 9, 2003

to Rieser,¹³¹ the U.S. and Colombian governments, American helicopter manufacturers, and some human rights NGOs, are the most influential in U.S. - Colombia relations. According to Serpa¹³², ambassador Morena is very good at bilateral relations and is the most influential Colombian actor. Shifter¹³³ characterizes Morena as “extraordinarily skilful” and Isacson¹³⁴ claims that “ambassador Morena is very good at running campaigns in public relations and pretty well connected in the U.S.” Isacson also mentions that many people in the government have given defense minister Ramirez high marks after meeting her.¹³⁵ Colombians in the U.S. are divided on everything, according to Isacson. “The wealthier Colombians, some of them to a lower degree, have lobbied for military aid, but mostly for free trade” (Ibid). These various actors and groups pull in different directions based on their interests and preferences, and finally a combination of all the policy preferences “wins”. Hence, and as argued by Milner, the final outcome of the policy making is arguably irrational from a unitary actor perspective. Therefore, I find it necessary to go beyond the rational, unitary model in order to more fully capture factors driving policy.

6.3 The “irrationality” of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia

Realists assume that actors are rational in their policy making. The so-called Rational Actor model assumes that the policy makers (1) can rationally relate means to ends; (2) have transitive preferences and in pursuing policy objectives, they clarify and order their values, goals, and preferences accordingly; (3) consider a limited range of alternative means to achieve preferred ends in terms of expected utility, and (4) choose the strategy most likely to yield the highest expected utility (Williams and Jawahar 2003:5).

¹³¹ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

¹³² Interview with Horacio Uribe Serpa, organization of American States, September 17, 2003

¹³³ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

¹³⁴ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September, 5 2003

¹³⁵ Ramirez resigned a little more than two months after this interview

Williams and Jawahar (Ibid) find that Plan Colombia's military approach veered sharply from a rational actor model partly due to a misdiagnosis of the policy problem by key supporters. According to these two authors, Washington expected a high utility from its military approach, which is in accordance with the rational perspective: (1) the greater the aid allocated to a given issue, the greater the expected utility and (2) the greater the number of policy components that increase the probability of the success of any single component, the greater the expected utility of that component.

Washington's decision to spend \$630 million on military measures clearly reflects a belief that such measures were necessary, and governments do not invest over a half billion dollars on enterprises they expect to fail (Ibid:5-6).

Williams and Jawahar (Ibid) emphasize that several factors illustrate the "irrationality" of Washington's mix of its policy components; military aid; social aid; governing capacity and peace. First, the two authors claim that the misdiagnosis of Colombia's civil war lead to ineffective policy. Although the drug war and Colombia's civil war have common fronts, they also have different causes and different long-term solutions. While Colombia's civil war was caused by deep-seeded domestic political/economic problems which require substantial structural and political reforms to resolve, the drug problem is the product of powerful demand and supply market forces and will not be resolved by over-emphasizing supply (Ibid:13).

Second, Williams and Jawahar claim that if the true objective of U.S. policymakers is drugs. They have chosen an "irrational" distribution of funds. Although military aid, social aid, governing capacity and peace are mutually reinforcing and tightly inter-linked factors, 75 percent of all aid is devoted to the military/police. In addition, a 1994 U.S. government-sponsored study determined that reducing drug demand via treatment is eleven times more cost-effective than interdiction and twenty-three times more cost-effective than source-country control (Ibid:8).

Mutimer (1997:193) claims there are several problems with a theory based on the maximization of expected utility as a basis for a theory of political action. He says that the problem with rational theory is that the problem, interests, and possible solutions are shaped, at least in part, metaphorically.

A problem is not presented to policy makers fully formed but is, rather, constituted by actors in their (discursive) practices. This practically constituted image of a security problem shapes the interests states have at stake in that problem, and the solutions that can be addressed to resolve it (Ibid).

Mutimer (Ibid:194) refers to Chilton who argues that policy makers address problems by means of what Mutimer himself calls “images.” The student or policy maker constructs a metaphorical image of a problem, an issue, or even other actors, which relates the thing being imagined to another. Moreover, these images compromise metaphors, which are used to structure and support our understanding of a problem, and therefore our response to that problem. The metaphors entailed by a given image do more than simply support a policy choice; they structure the way in which the image holder can think about a problem and so shape that choice in the first place (Ibid). Mutimer underlines that it would be surprising if we lived our lives and understood our most basic activities and practices in terms of metaphor, and then abandoned metaphoric reasoning and understanding at the level of social and political action. Moreover, he claims that these arguments oppose the rational choice that there are pre-constituted state interests (Ibid).

Social constructivists claim that in international relations, interests are not fixed but emerge from processes of social interaction and communication, (structures and agency are mutually constitutive ideas-worldviews, principled beliefs, and knowledge). These processes not only define the meaning of power but also affect the reasoning process by which state actors define their interests. They believe that the logic of anarchy itself is socially constructed, as pre-social actors do not need to be conceptualized as potentially hostile (Krause and Williams 1997:263-262). In other

words, the whole social preoccupation with security is less a matter of a pre-given political reality and more a matter of the social construction of political orders (Ibid).

6.4 Motivation behind U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia: election year

According to Stan Goff, a former U.S. Special Forces intelligence sergeant: “The objective of our operations was not the Colombians but the Americans who pay taxes for the investment made in Colombia [...]” (Dunning and Wirspa 2004: 4).

Shifter¹³⁶ claims that according to polls done before September 11th, people were not very interested in foreign policy. There has, however, always been a concern about the drug issue, and how it affects communities and families in the U.S. The U.S. decided to go after the supply side, and Colombia became kind of the proxy for the war. Shifter describes this pressure for deeper U.S. “intervention” in Colombia as a result of a “passion” or “energy” in getting involved in Colombia. In fact, he claims that this pressure came from Congress. He adds that there was a sense in Congress that if you wanted to get reelected, you had to show that you were tough on drugs. Isacson agrees with Shifter in that politicians need to be strong on drugs, but also on terrorism, to be reelected:

In most congressional districts you need to be tough and put an emphasis on military to be reelected. There are people all over the country, who have gotten scared, kids are afraid of going outside their front door. You want your campaign add to have you standing in front of helicopters and fumigation tanks instead of businesses growing cows.¹³⁷

Isacson explains that it is important to be tough on drugs particularly in a congressional district that has a middle and upper class Latino population such as

¹³⁶ Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

¹³⁷ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September, 5 2003

Texas and Florida. Latinos are the fastest-growing group of ethnic voters in the country, and their numbers are greatest in key states like Florida, New York, Texas, and California. Moreover, there are approximately 73 congressional districts where Latinos are about 15 percent of the population. So in any close congressional district you could have the Latino community in that district decide who's going to be the next member of Congress (Online Newshour 2000).

Isacson (Ibid) argues that “Americans want safety in their neighborhoods and violence comes with drugs.” He continues by saying that awareness among Americans is very low. Unless, your opponents decide that they can attack you for taking positions that are soft on drugs, the American people will not be outraged because you voted for or against the current policy.

Petras (2001:37) argues that, “the anti-drug rhetoric is more for domestic consumption than any operational guide to action.” In the annual report on “the World Geopolitics of Drugs” it is argued that

Because no politician, whether from the Democratic or the Republican party, wishes to be perceived as “soft on drugs”, breaches of drug laws, which are defined as “non violent” by the judiciary, are more severely punished in some states today than crimes such as homicide, kidnapping, and rape (2000:129).

“All politicians know that they get more votes back home if they are tough on drugs,” argues Youngers (2000:1-2). Moreover he claims that staying involved in the Latin American region has become the “raison d’être” for the Southern Command (Ibid:2). A former head of the Southern Command described the U.S. military’s involvement in Colombia as a “marriage for life” and not a “one-night stand.” He also argues that the domestic war on drugs and the U.S. military are the two fundamental forces behind U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia (Ibid). He refers to rhetoric by Representative Dan Burton who has said that, “We’re in danger of losing the entire Northern tier of South America to drug-traffickers” and “the coca growers are the first link in the chain that leads to death and destruction on U.S. inner-city streets” (Ibid).

By linking drug-traffickers to the death of Americans, Representative Dan Burton plays on the American identity. At least it may cause more attention to the need of securing the U.S. against drug-traffickers. The statement is arguably, also likely to cause more attention among voters than one purely focused on the drug-traffickers.

The annual report on the “World Geopolitics of Drugs” (2002:130), suggests that the drug industry has contributed to a business for U.S. prisons, and in fact “the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, the agency managing the federal correctional system, has received the largest share of federal drug control budgets (Ibid). Bell¹³⁸, who views the main factor for U.S. involvement as domestic concerns about drug abuse, labels it “domestic policy expanded.” She refers to the fact that U.S. politicians know that the voters are concerned about drugs and the violence that it often breeds. “It is recognized that if we could stop all production of drugs in Colombia, the U.S. would still have a drug problem” (Ibid). Hence, especially in election years, politicians seem to be more engaged in the drug issue than at other times. However, according to Pearl¹³⁹, illicit drug is not a big issue in the 2004-election. Instead, the economy, the war in Iraq and the enormous deficit are of dominating importance. Despite Pearl’s statement, this thesis is concerned about the U.S. long-term interests in Colombia in the post-Cold War era and hence Bell’s argument about the significance of the drug issue in the election campaigns is still relevant.

McLean¹⁴⁰ says that, “Americans view on narcotics is sort of funny.” In an election year, it becomes a pretty important for politicians.” Again, this could be understood, from a constructive perspective, that drugs are not the real problem but might be emphasized to fill the vacuum that is missing after the Cold War ended. Hence drugs play the role as the new external threat. The consumption of drugs is going down a little bit if you compare numbers from 1989 to 1993, but if drug production is reduced in Colombia, the U.S. will still have a demand for illicit drugs sourced from other locations”(Ibid).

¹³⁸ Interview with Susan Bell, Bell, Colombia Desk Officer, U.S. Department of State, September 9, 2003

¹³⁹ Interview with Jonathan Pearl, legislative correspondent to Senator Dodd, September 12, 2003

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Policy, September 4, 2003

In 1991 the Colombian state hired PR specialists that were going to transform Americans' perceptions about the Colombian state from that of a corrupt and brutal abuser of human rights to a staunch ally of the U.S. The message conveyed that there are "good" and "bad" people in Colombia, and the Colombian government is compromised of the good guys. Colombia gave over \$3.1 million to an advertising campaign in which ads and TV commercials were aimed at American policy makers in Washington (Stokes 2002:1). This shows us that Colombia also benefits from the distinction that U.S. officials make between black and white distinctions such as "good" and "bad" people.

6.5 Democrats vs. Republicans

Traditionally, foreign policy in the U.S has not been subject to high levels of institutional or party competition. Few foreign policy issues actually divide neatly along party lines. On the contrary, the far right and the far left have often joined forces to support more isolationist or protectionist policies. There has been an increasing fragmentation of foreign policy in Congress with changing coalitions often able to block administration policies or even the majority position in Congress. In addition, a decline in prestige of the foreign policy committee accompanied by the growing perception that most foreign policy issues do not interest the voters has given most Congress members little incentive to take an active role in this area (Cameron 2002: 67-69). Nonetheless, U.S. presidents do feel pressured at times from various domestic groups. Some people, such as Aby (2004:1), underline that Plan Colombia started under a Democratic president, but García Peña¹⁴¹ claims that Clinton was dictated to by Republicans. In fact, former president Clinton was criticized by many in Congress for being "soft" on drugs, and hence ended up disregarding the warnings of his own advisors in order to satisfy Congress members (Carpenter 2003:55).

¹⁴¹ Interview with Daniel Garcia-Peña Jarmillo, Director of Planet Peace, April 15, 2004

When it comes to the difference between Republicans and Democrats on Colombia, Shifter¹⁴² states that the Democrats are much more questioning than Republicans and that Colombia policy is a point of partisan battle. There is support for cutting aid among the liberal Democrats as they believe a cut in aid to Colombia would be more efficient for the drug war. Their belief may be based on the fear that U.S. aid is coming into the hands of illegal Colombian groups or they believe that focusing on drug demand is more efficient than dealing with the supply side of the drug problem. However, on the last vote on aid to Colombia, there was a higher democratic support than previous votes (Ibid).

The Republicans have traditionally been in favor of a more military solution, both before and after September 11th.¹⁴³ Isacson (Ibid) suggests that approximately 10 percent of the Republicans go back to the old isolationist tradition of the U.S. limiting itself from foreign entanglements. Furthermore, he says that the Democrats are very evenly divided. The vast majority of the Democrats in the House of Representatives tend to vote for restriction in military assistance, while in the Senate many prominent democratic senators continue to support the current policy. He explains the difference by arguing that in the Senate there are more Democrats who: a) represent entire states with much greater diversity of opinion and a lot more business interests than the smaller districts that many House Representatives represent and b) realize potential of being president one day, and once your name is in the polls you tend to move toward the mainstream in many opinions. “As opposed to the House of Representative where there have been two debates on Colombia already this year, we have not seen a debate on Colombia on the Senate floor in at least two years” (Ibid). McLean¹⁴⁴ stresses that Democrats are softer on drugs - that a democratic politician is more likely to say that he is for the use of marijuana for medical purposes.

¹⁴² Interview with Michael Shifter, Inter American Dialogue, September 4, 2003

¹⁴³ Interview with Adam Isacson, Center for International Policy, September 5, 2003

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Phillip McLean, Center for Strategic and International Policy, September 4, 2003

After September 11th, travelers in the U.S. were able to observe a people that appeared very united. Car owners decorated their cars with flags and streets, gas stations, and other areas could be seen with signs saying words such as “We will never forget”.¹⁴⁵ Woodrow¹⁴⁶ thinks that September 11th united people and made them able to come together. She still thinks that some Democrats oppose the drug policy and how the U.S. handles it. They have also expressed that the Uribe government is not paying enough attention to human rights. She would not say that Republicans care less about human rights, but that they “see eye to eye with Uribe a bit more in terms of the value of line order”. She mentions the amendment by Senator William Frist, the Republican majority leader, in which he expressed a sense from the Senate that Uribe is doing a great job. This amendment passed without any opposition in the Senate (Ibid). Rieser¹⁴⁷ argues that there are some differences between the Republicans and the Democrats in their views on Colombia, but right now he does not believe that many people in the Congress are very focused on Colombia. Based on these arguments, one may believe that there are in fact a difference between Democrats and Republicans. However, these differences are hard to measure. Still we can assume that both sides will make the illicit drug issue more important in election years than others.

6.6 Summary of chapter six

When addressing U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia it is necessary to take domestic U.S. politics into consideration. The perspectives and discussions of the reasons and justifications for U.S. involvement in Colombia continually shift between anti-narcotics, anti-terror, and oil interests. Due to lack of a unitary actor, individual rationality leads to collective irrationality concerning U.S. protection of their national interests in Colombia, such as oil and stability. The complexity of U.S. foreign

¹⁴⁵ I saw a particular sign in South Dakota a few months after September 11th

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Lorianne Woodrow, Legislative assistant to Senator Coleman, September 12, 2003

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy’s foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

policymaking makes what may be “rational” on an individual level “irrational” on a collective one. Hence my hypothesis that “*it is crucial to address the complexity of U.S. domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia*” is strengthened.

7. Concluding remarks

*When the foundations of a building are not well made, the building ends up collapsing, no matter how impressive the façade.*¹⁴⁸

Colombia's internal conflict has lasted for more than four decades, and in 1999 Colombia became the third largest recipient of U.S. security aid in the world. Most analysts cite a need for the U.S. to help strengthen and reform Colombia's political institutions and to promote the observance of human rights (Serafino 2001:27). Many also disagree with U.S. policy towards Colombia as currently configured. The purpose of this thesis has first been to address "*to what extent the threats posed by drugs explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia in the post Cold War era*" and second to address "*how U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is interpreted through realist, liberalist and constructivist lenses.*" In this chapter, I give concluding remarks and address the future prospects of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. I also analyze the fruitfulness of the bureaucratic actor model.

7.1 Drugs as the trope for U.S. presence in Colombia

The U.S. was one of the first countries to recognize the new Colombian republic in 1882. In 2000, "Plan Colombia" was approved and signed into law and Colombia is now one of the most trusted allies of the U.S. In addition, after the Cold War there has been an increase in visits by U.S. officials to Colombia and the U.S. has officially taken a stand against the paramilitaries by adding the AUC to the list of international terrorist groups. Although these changes started before September 11th, the terrorist

¹⁴⁸ Ricardo Vargas Meza (2001:5), sociologist, Associate Fellow of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. He represents the Andean Action Platform in Colombia.

attacks acted as a catalyst to the process. The main impact that the September 11th terrorist attacks had on Colombia was the approval by Congress to expand the scope of assistance beyond counter-narcotics to also include assistance to counter-terrorism efforts. However, it can be argued that this was simply a formalization of a policy that also was prevalent during Clinton's presidency. Furthermore, examples of Congressional hearings from 1999 to present show that the U.S. was concerned about terror in Colombia before September 11th and that the shift has been quite gradual. This strengthens my first hypothesis that *"drugs play a role in U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics."*

7.2 Drugs on the background of geopolitics

In 1999, U.S. military bases in the Panama Canal were forced to redeploy because the Canal was being taken over by the national authorities. This made it important for the U.S. to secure its relationship with Colombia through "Plan Colombia". Not only is Colombia's neighbor, Venezuela, a major U.S. oil supplier but Colombia is also an oil-producing state that has substantial untapped reserves. In addition, as long as the U.S. continues to have allies in the hemisphere, the chances of avoiding "radical populism" against U.S. hegemony are higher. Because of its location, the U.S. is also worried about the flow of illegal drugs coming into the U.S. from Colombia. Indeed, geopolitical considerations play an important role in American foreign policy towards Colombia. Hence, and again, my hypothesis that *"drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics"* has been strengthened.

7.3 The complexity of U.S. domestic politics

The U.S. is a country consisting of many factions pulling in different directions. The perspectives and discussions of the reasons and justifications for U.S. involvement in

Colombia continually shift between anti-narcotics, anti-terror, and oil interests. The U.S has multiple and some times competing reasons and justifications for being involved in Colombia. While some in the government voice the need for more money to be spent on anti-drug treatment at home, other government departments in Washington argue for more money to be spent on Black Hawk helicopters in Colombia.

The complexity of U.S. foreign policymaking makes what may be “rational” on an individual level “irrational” on a collective one. Hence no single explanation (e.g anti-narcotics) is sufficient to understand the U.S. longstanding willingness to be involved in Colombia.

My hypothesis that *“it is crucial to address the complexity of U.S. domestic politics to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia”* is strengthened.

7.4 Applying theory

Geopolitics appears to be a key factor motivating U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. The U.S. has economic interests in Colombia, which can be understood from the perspective of realism. Also, because of its location the U.S. is affected by Colombian illicit drugs which have access to the U.S. black market. Drugs could therefore pose a security threat to the U.S. based on the wider definition of security threats based in liberalism. In addition to being a domestic concern, drugs also fuel terror within Colombia, which can ultimately lead to a collapse in democracy. This could then turn Colombia into a security threat to the U.S. Not only would a collapse of the Colombian democracy threaten U.S. economic interests in the country, but it would also destroy Colombia as the image of a U.S. “show case.” This means that the U.S. image of combating terror on a global scale would be tarnished, and the danger of the U.S. being accused of only fighting “the Muslim terror” would be greater. Although, Colombia *could* potentially become a security threat to the U.S. in the broader sense of the security term, this seems to be quite hypothetical. In fact, it seems like U.S. politicians use this potential security threat to obtain votes as

politicians know that they get more support by showing that they are strong on drugs. Hence drugs seem to have become securitized through rhetoric. Social constructivism is one approach that may help explain this.

7.5 Towards a U.S. intervention?

Current U.S. law caps the number of military personnel and contractors at 400 each. The cap applies only to personnel engaged in Plan Colombia operations (P.L. 106-246, Section 3204(b) through (d) as amended by P.K 107-115). This means that military personnel engaged in search and rescue operations are not subject to the limit of 400 on the number of troops that can be deployed to Colombia at one time. The President reported to the Congress on June 20, 2003, that as of May 13, there were 358 temporary and permanent U.S. military personnel and 308 civilian contractors in the country in support of Plan Colombia. Legislation in the House to authorize Department of Defense programs for FY2004 (HR 1588; Section 1208) raised the cap on military personnel to 500 while maintaining the number of contractors at 400. It included exemptions for personnel involved in search and rescue operations, but their deployment may not exceed 30 days (Sullivan et al. 2003:7).

Most of the respondents argued that the U.S. is not intervening both due to the current caps and the fact that Colombians invited the U.S. Ceballos, for instance, argues:

When you are talking about intervention you are talking about open military decisions to change the course of a country. With only 400 advisors you cannot change that, and one example to show that we don't have an intervention is the decision made by President Uribe about not giving the U.S. the waiver for the ICC.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Miguel Ceballos, director for the Colombia program at Georgetown University, September 9, 2003

Others, such as Woodrow, also emphasize that that these personnel are not fighting anyone, just providing training and assistance.

The U.S. tries to help Uribe set up police stations in places that haven't had a police presence in decades, and train his military in rescuing people that have been kidnapped.¹⁵⁰

Finally many people, such as Sweig¹⁵¹, argue that the Colombians did invite the U.S. She argues that it is a “dance between two separate entities as opposed to a classic relationship that the word intervening suggests” (Ibid). She adds that the Colombian elite has campaigned diligently since 1998 for more and more American involvement. She believes that these elites and the last two Colombian governments would actually prefer more not less U.S. involvement. “Colombia – its government and its people – are asking for more from us than what we are able to give,” Riser¹⁵² says. He claims that the Congress hears from the Colombian government, Colombian NGOs, Colombian academics and journalists, even Colombian indigenous groups, who want the U.S. to be involved in different ways. He emphasizes that these groups do not agree with all the aspects of the policy, in fact some oppose it, but they do agree that the U.S. can help them solve the country's problems. Serpa¹⁵³ also claims that the U.S. and Colombia work together and Bell¹⁵⁴ thinks that involvement would be a more accurate word to use than intervention as she thinks the first sounds like there are two parties. “What is happening in Iraq, I think is intervention, because nobody asked us to go in there”.¹⁵⁵

As manifested, the main argument is that the U.S. is not intervening due to the current cap and that the U.S. got an invitation to be there. Does this mean that their

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Lorianne Woodrow, Legislative Assistant to Senator Coleman, September 12, 2003

¹⁵¹ Interview with Julia Sweig, Council of Foreign Relations, September 9, 2003

¹⁵² Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy's foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

¹⁵³ Interview with Horacio Serpa Uribe, Colombian Ambassador to the Organization of American States, September 17, 2003

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Susan Bell, Colombia desk officer, Department of State, September 9, 2003

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Tim Rieser, Senator Leahy's foreign policy aide, September 12, 2003

argument would falter if the U.S. increased its caps? Until early 2004, officials from the State and Defense Departments gave regular assurances that they saw no need to increase the caps. However, this changed after the Colombian military initiated its “Plan Patriota” in 2003, an offensive in longtime guerrilla strongholds that depends on logistical assistance, intelligence, and advice from U.S. personnel present in Colombia. During spring of 2004, the Bush administration started to argue that with “Plan Patriota” under way and U.S. involvement increasing, the caps had become troublesome. General Hill and others asked Congress to double the cap to 800 U.S. personnel and to increase the contractor cap by 50 percent, to 600 (The homepage of the Center for International Policy). At this moment it is not yet decided whether the U.S. will increase its caps or not, but an increase in the cap will send a very strong signal that the U.S. is getting its overstretched military more deeply involved in another complex foreign conflict (Ibid). This, however, does not automatically mean that the U.S. would be intervening. Based on the definition of intervention by Levite et al. that was given in chapter three, the U.S. would have “to interfere, usually by force or threat in Colombia in order to call the policy an “intervention.” So far, it seems as if the Colombian administration welcomes the U.S. engagement. Hence as long as the U.S. is invited by the Colombian government, an increase in the caps would not indicate that the U.S. is intervening, at least not based on the definition by Levite et al.

7.6 The fruitfulness of models

Arild Underdal (1984) lists four specific criteria that are useful to evaluate the generating power of a model. These are generality, conclusiveness, validity and parsimony. By *generality* he means the intended scope of validity. By *conclusiveness* he means to the extent to which one will be able to produce precise, specific, and non-trivial propositions. By *validity* he means to what extent the model succeeds in capturing the essence of the real-world phenomena it is intended to represent. By *parsimony* he means the costs of operating the model.

7.6.1 How fruitful is my model?

The model applied in this thesis is quite complex. Rather than accepting the assumption of unity, the state is regarded as a complex organization, whose actions are determined through the interaction of a number of sub-actors. That is, the state has non-identical preference structures, perceptions, and beliefs. Graham Allison's bureaucratic politics model assumes that 1) the foreign policy of a state is formed through a number of more or less interrelated *games*, and 2) in each game there are *several players* 3) who play the game by virtue of the *position* or 4) *role* he occupies (Underdal 1984:70). The foreign policy of a state is conceptualized as being made up of the sum of all the game outcomes. By shattering the assumption of unity, the bureaucratic politics model also discards the assumption of rationality as applied to states (Ibid:71).

First, the bureaucratic model is quite complex and is more applicable to certain situations. For example, in the case of Colombia, there is a lack of cohesion in American policy making due to a lack of a clearly defined set of objectives. The case of Afghanistan, in contrast, was characterized by greater unity around a common threat, with a clear objective. Thus, the non-unitary actor model is applicable to the former, where as the unitary actor model is sufficient for the latter. Hence, while necessary for this analysis, the scope of applicability of this model is more limited than that of the rational actor model (which is potentially a very general one) and hence scores lower on generality.

Second, the bureaucratic model is also less conclusive because there is more uncertainty connected to the model due to inadequate information.

Third, the unitary, rational actor paradigm is normally superior in research economy to the complex organization model. To for instance find out the preferences and voting pattern of all the various actors involved in the U.S. foreign policymaking would require much effort.

However, the strongest aspect of my chosen model is the validity of it. It was precisely due to the complexity of U.S. objectives and the over simplistic nature of the unitary actor model that I turned to the more complex non-unitary actor model. This

allowed a more fully and complete analysis of the driving forces of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Also, with regard to validity, the bureaucratic model is assumed to be most valid for controversial, subgroup issues.

Finally, as Underdal predicts, the validity of my model has come at the cost of greater complexity, or less parsimony. That is to say, in order to fully describe U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, I was forced to sacrifice simplicity. However, given the aim of this paper to describe U.S. policy, I find this sacrifice warranted.

The bureaucratic actor model fits U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia because it is a case of U.S. long-term engagement and differs from many other cases where the U.S. has been, or is, engaged. Afghanistan, however, is an example that was perceived more as a threat and U.S. policymakers appeared to consent more in the interests and also the necessary strategies that were needed. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic model seems to be a good model also for other complex cases such as U.S. foreign policy towards Israel. Israel does, in many respects, share commonalities with Colombia, in that the U.S. has been involved in both countries for many years with more long term objectives. Both countries are also of geopolitical interests to the U.S. and both have groups that threaten to destabilize the countries themselves and their respective regions. Despite some drawbacks to the model, it appears to be the best choice in an effort to best capture the realities of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. In particular, I found it necessary to sacrifice some generality and parsimony in return for greater validity. This followed from the aim of this; that of describing the driving forces of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia, which is characterized by different domestic interests reflected through interest groups, party politics, and lobby groups. Underdal (1984) argues that the non-unitary actor model is particularly applicable to the governmental apparatus of Washinton, D.C. I have argued that U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is best captured by applying a bureaucratic actor model. This is due to the fact that behind the policymaking there are multiple and some times competing reasons and justifications for U.S. involvement in Colombia. What seems “rational” on an individual level ends up being “irrational” on a collective one. Despite the bureaucratic actor model’s weakness on

generality and conclusiveness, I argue that the model is better than the unitary, rational actor model in capturing the real-world phenomena it is intended to represent: the complexity of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia.

7.7 Concluding remarks

The purpose of this thesis has been to identify and discuss the driving factors behind U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. The main question of this thesis has been “*to what extent can the threats posed by drugs explain U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia in the post Cold War era?*” In answering that question I have looked at how geopolitical concerns, drugs, terror, and instability have been influenced by: (1) the structure of world policy and (2) September 11th.

A common understanding of U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is that it is driven by domestic drug prevention policy against production of illegal substances originating in Colombia destined for the U.S. My thesis argues that such an understanding is an over-simplification of a complex set of issues. Drug concerns are a necessary but not sufficient answer to U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Hence, my first hypothesis: “*drugs play a role in the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia but the policy itself can only be understood on the background of geopolitics*” has been strengthened.

Moreover, I argue that because the U.S. objectives in Colombia are many, the actual policy making is too complex for a unitary actor model. The perspectives and discussions of the reasons and justifications for U.S. involvement in Colombia continually shift between anti-narcotics, anti-terror, and oil interests.

These multiple and sometimes competing reasons and justifications for being involved in Colombia reinforce the argument that no single explanation is sufficient to understand the U.S. longstanding willingness to be involved in Colombia. Based on this, my second hypothesis that “*it is crucial to address the complexity of U.S. domestic policy to understand U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia*” is also strengthened.

The theoretical part of my thesis has been to *demonstrate how the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia is interpreted through realist, liberalist and constructivist lenses*. These three approaches are regarded as complementary rather than competing. Due to the complexity of U.S. competing objectives and justifications for involvement, all three approaches may help explain the U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia. Geopolitics appears to be a key factor motivating U.S. foreign policy towards Colombia because of U.S. economic interests in both Colombia and the Andean region. In my analysis, I argued that liberalism, with its focus on strengthening human rights, democracy and co-operation only accurately explains the stated objectives of Plan Colombia and not the real objectives: anti-narcotics, anti-terror, and oil interests. In addition I have addressed whether *Colombia is a security threat to the U.S. in (i) a traditional way or (ii) a wider understanding of the security term*. I argued that U.S. politicians consciously play on the potential spill-over of the Colombian conflict in their rhetoric to obtain support for anti-drug and anti-terror policy. Hence drugs seem to have become securitized through rhetoric. Social constructivism is one approach that may help explain this. Finally, although the reasons and justifications may vary from one administration to another, regardless of the administration – be it Democratic or Republican – all seem to agree that the U.S. continues to have strategic interests in Colombia and should therefore remain engaged.

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